GAME-LEGS

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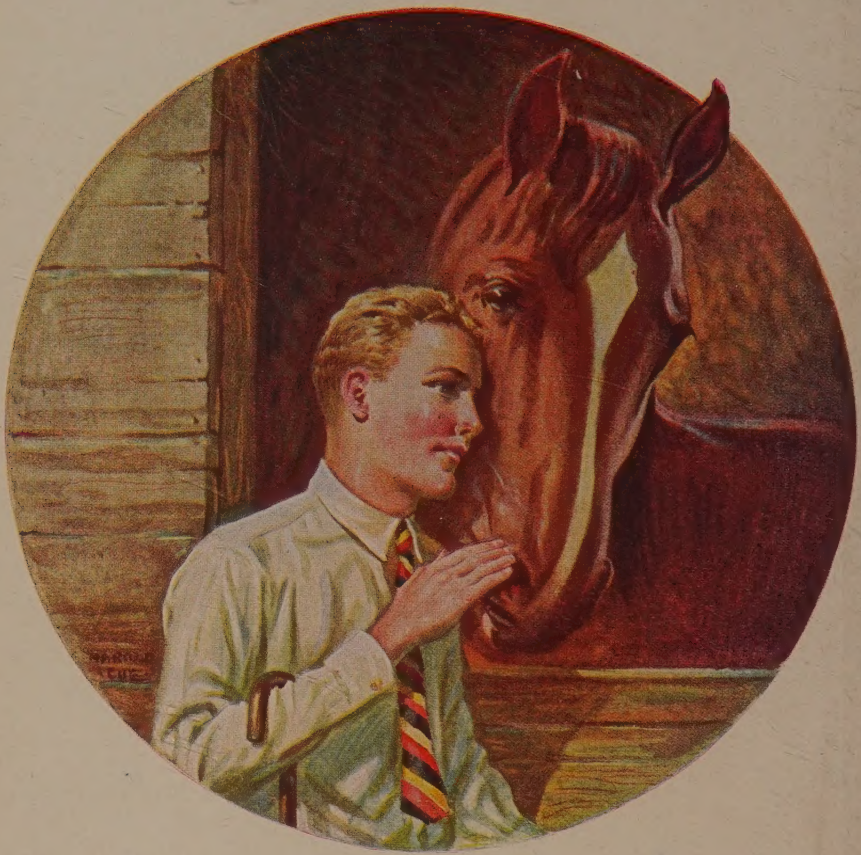
ARTHUR C. BARTLETT

Christmas - 1945

Merry Christmas

to Glenn

from Ruth



GAME-LEGS

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A HORSE WITH A HEART

BY

ARTHUR C. BARTLETT

ILLUSTRATED BY

HAROLD C. CUE

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PUBLISHERS
NEW YORK

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GAME-LEGS

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CHAPTER I

NETTIE'S COLT

A SOLEMN and momentous conference was being held in Dr. Burbank's stable. The subject of discussion was old Nettie's newborn colt, and those participating in it were Dr. Burbank, Dr. Wragg, the veterinary, and Josh Thibber. The three of them stood just outside old Nettie's stall, leaning their elbows on the lower half of the stall door, peering in at Nettie and her colt as they talked.

The veterinary was doing most of the talking, with Josh occasionally putting in a few words, to which Dr. Burbank merely nodded unhappily. The purport of the conversation was that Nettie's colt was a very imperfect creature, and that the chances of her ever becoming an able-bodied mare were exceedingly slight. It was this unpleasant fact that the veterinary was trying to impress upon Dr.

Burbank, while the doctor's old friend Josh, convinced that the veterinary was right, still tried to soften the disappointment a little by injecting a word of hope here and there as the latter paused in his dismal monologue. These interruptions, however, only served to make the blunt old veterinary the more emphatic, and Josh soon lapsed into silence. The veterinary droned on.

To say that Dr. Burbank was disappointed in Nettie's colt would be a gross understatement of his feelings. He was utterly dejected. He had made great plans for Nettie's colt. She was to have been the crown princess of his stable—the heiress apparent to Nettie's throne.

Old Nettie, indeed, was more than queen of the Burbank stable. She was practically a member of the Burbank family.

Almost everybody in Bryantsville had heard the doctor say, at one time or another: "Well, sir, when I started to practice medicine in this town all I had was a brand-new education, a brand-new wife, a brand-new mare, and a handful of pills." And he would add: "The

pills lost all their goodness before I found a patient to take them, but the other three keep right on improving with age."

Nettie was the erstwhile "brand-new mare." But twenty-five years had passed since the doctor had brought her to Bryantsville along with his education, his wife, and his pills; nowadays he spoke of her affectionately as "the old mare."

"She's a better horse every day of her life," he would insist. But it was his affection that spoke. Or perhaps he was referring to her disposition. For he knew, without admitting it, that Nettie was failing physically, as any horse of her age was bound to do. He recognized this in his actions, if not in his words, and used her now only for short and infrequent trips. In his inner consciousness he knew that the day was not far distant when his familiar footstep in the stable would fail to evoke a welcoming whinny from Nettie's stall. And when that day came, he knew, Nettie would be dead.

And so Dr. Burbank had decided that Nettie should have a colt—a colt that should

be a monument to her, and take her place in the family affections when she was gone. True, she was rather old to bring a colt into the world, but the doctor had great faith in her strength, and he knew that she would devote herself as whole-heartedly to the business of being a mother as she did to everything else she undertook.

The colt was sired by Lord John, one of the most famous stallions in the state, and the sire of many race horses. Nettie herself was from pedigreed stock, but, as the doctor said, she was "too democratic to stand on her pedigree."

In her day Nettie had been one of the best driving horses in Bryants county. And, indeed, in those early days of her partnership with Dr. Burbank she had needed the stamina, strength, and spirit which her breeding had given her. On her ability to get the young doctor over the country roads had depended the lives of many patients; and she had never failed, although sometimes her strength, like the doctor's, had been sorely taxed by long night drives after a busy day.

Thus had been cemented between the doctor and his horse a strong bond, and it had never weakened. Later other horses had come to share Nettie's labors, but none of them had ever equalled her in their owner's affections, although he loved horses as any man must who has learned to depend on them and trust them. After a while, too, an automobile (the first in town) had been introduced into the Burbank menage, lightening Nettie's duties still further. But there were still several months every year when Bryants county roads were impassable to automobiles, and the horses therefore had remained, with Nettie as reigning favorite.

One other colt Nettie had brought into the world, and a fine, upstanding colt it was, worthy of its mother. Nettie was fifteen years old at the time, and still in the prime of life as a driving horse. Dr. Burbank had watched the colt developing into a replica of its mother, and had been inordinately proud. Then one day his father had driven into town from his farm, back in the hills, and the doctor had taken him out to see the colt. The old farmer

had looked the colt over carefully, and had listened to his son's eulogies. An amused look had crept into his eyes as he listened.

"I cal'late she's goin' to be a great hoss, Jamie," he had said, with his down-East drawl. "I dunno but she'll be a better hoss than her mother. But I'll allow I'm surprised to see you goin' back on old Nettie."

"Going back on Nettie?" the doctor had repeated, laughing. "I guess not. Horseflesh can't equal that old girl, in my opinion."

But his father's shrewd remark had stayed with him, and had awakened in him a strange jealousy. Was Nettie's colt threatening her mother's supremacy in his stable? The doctor had decided to allow no such risk, and before his father had gone back to the farm the colt had been sold to him, and Nettie was once more the undisputed mistress of her domain.

Now Nettie's second colt had been born under entirely different circumstances. The passing of ten years had given Nettie a new status. Her prestige no longer depended on the power of her aged legs and lungs. She had earned the right to live on her reputation. A colt,

no matter how capable and gifted it might be, would only reflect her glory. So the doctor had reasoned.

But the colt was imperfect, and the doctor was dejected. The veterinary droned on, and then, with a wave of his hand in a gesture of finality, turned away from Nettie's stall and walked slowly toward the stable door. Dr. Burbank and Josh turned and watched him disappear down the driveway. Neither spoke for a few moments.

At length the doctor broke the silence. "Poor old Nettie," he said. "She's getting old."

It was the first time he had ever admitted it.

Josh accepted the doctor's words as meaning that the conversation about the unfortunate colt was at an end for the present. "The old mare ain't dead yet, by a long shot," he said.

"Well, hardly," said the doctor.

"S'pose I drop in to-night and we'll play a little cribbage," said Josh.

"I wish you would," said the doctor.

Josh walked down the driveway and disappeared from sight. The doctor re-entered the

stable and walked again to Nettie's stall. He stood for a moment looking in, as before. Then he lifted the bar which held the lower part of the door closed, opened it, and entered the large box stall. Nettie whinnied gently and started to come out as the door opened, but at a word from the doctor she remained still. He stroked her neck, almost mechanically.

The colt lay on the straw beside her. Puny and gangling it was, but that was to be expected of a new-foaled colt. But the doctor had to admit to himself that there was more than this to lend strength to the veterinary's pessimistic opinions. There was an attitude of helplessness about the scrawny animal; the doctor, trained in observing the subconscious feelings of invalids, could sense it. Something was wrong with the colt. Yet the doctor knew the power of nature, and he still had hope that the colt would get a grasp on life after all.

Something about the way the colt looked up at him encouraged him in this hope. It was Nettie's own look—or he imagined it was.

The doctor squatted down and touched the colt gingerly.

Footsteps on the stable floor, together with a thumping sound in time with the footsteps, caused the doctor to straighten up guiltily, like a small boy caught in mischief. He did not want Jimmy to know that there was anything wrong. He stepped out of the stall.

"Oh, hello, Jimmy," he said, simulating surprise.

"Hello, dad. How is the colt?"

"Can't tell much about it yet," said the doctor, inwardly excusing himself for the half-lie. "Come and take a look for yourself."

Jimmy Burbank—James Burbank, Jr.,—was a cripple. An attack of infantile paralysis at an early age had left him paralyzed in both legs. Gradually he had regained the slight use of them, but he was still dependent on the use of two stout walking sticks—one in each hand—for getting about. Even with the aid of his canes, he made slow and awkward progress.

Being naturally sensitive, Jimmy had suffered much from his infirmity—more mentally

than physically. Not only had he been unable to enter into the sports of the other boys, thereby losing the great joys of his boyhood, but he had often been a target for the thoughtless jibes of the unthinking and for the bullying of the cowards. Thus he had been driven to seek his own amusements, and he had found his greatest pleasure in driving his father's horses.

Here was one pastime, Jimmy had found, where he did not have to worry about being outdone by other boys. His handicap vanished when he was seated in a buggy behind a horse. And as every boy likes to be a winner at something, Jimmy took great pleasure in matching his father's fleet and spirited horses against the lesser animals that some of the other boys were able to borrow occasionally from fathers or uncles.

Jimmy looked forward eagerly to the day when the new colt would be in harness. Like his father, he fairly worshipped old Nettie and believed her the greatest horse that ever lived. Her colt, he felt sure, would be a paragon.

He thumped his way across the stable floor

and looked into Nettie's stall. His face reflected his disappointment as he saw the scrawny colt in the straw. Somehow he had expected a more impressive sight, though he knew that colts were always scraggly at first.

"She's kind of funny looking, isn't she?" he said to his father. "I'd sort of expected her to be all ready for the harness," he grinned.

"I guess we won't hitch her up just yet," said the doctor.

Unsuspecting the grim thought behind his father's laconic response, Jimmy went into the house. As the days passed, however, he began to wonder if all was well with the colt. He noticed that the old veterinary's visits were frequent, and Josh Thibber was often in absorbed conference with his father. He hinted at his suspicions, both to his father and to Josh, but received only evasive answers.

His suspicions became keener and keener as he visited Nettie's stall and saw the colt still lying passively in the straw, day after day. He did not know just how old a colt usually was before it began to walk, but he was sure he had seen colts no larger than this one run-

ning after their mothers. Yet Nettie's colt lay still in the stall.

The colt was three weeks old before Jimmy learned the truth. He entered the stable in the midst of one of those frequent conferences between the veterinary, Josh, and his father. Dr. Wragg was inside the stall, and Dr. Burbank and Josh leaned over the halfdoor, looking in. They were so absorbed that they did not hear Jimmy approaching until he was almost beside them. Then his father flashed a look to Josh that seemed to say, "It's no use hiding it any longer," and they merely nodded and moved over to give him a place beside them.

Nettie was not in the stall, but the colt was there, and the veterinary was holding her up on her feet, experimentally.

"Now then," he said, "we'll see what she can do."

He stepped back to the side of the stall, still holding the colt up and leaning over her. Then he suddenly released his grasp. The colt sank helplessly into the straw, her legs crumpling under her.

"You see," said the veterinary, almost triumphantly. "It's no use."

Jimmy could not contain himself. "What is the matter with her?" he demanded.

Dr. Wragg looked at him impatiently, as though annoyed by the question. He was a blunt old man, and proud of it. He saw no good in evading the truth.

"Matter with her?" he said. "Matter enough. Her legs wun't hold her; that's the matter. She's a weak-kneed sister; that's what."

"Oh," said Jimmy. "Oh, I see." His voice trailed away.

He turned and walked laboriously out of the stable. Outside he sat down on a bench and stared into space. Then he brought his eyes down to contemplate his own defective legs.

"Weak-kneed sister," he whispered to himself.

CHAPTER II

THE PRICE OF IMPERFECTION

"YOU needn't have said that to the boy," said Dr. Burbank to the old veterinary after Jimmy had gone out of the stable. "Can't you see how it hurt him?"

Dr. Wragg continued his examination of the colt in silence for a few moments. As a veterinary, he had great respect for Dr. Burbank, whose profession dealt with human beings instead of horses. But he was an old man, whereas Dr. Burbank was still comparatively young, and he had the unbounded confidence in his own judgment which old age often brings.

"Well," he said, at last, "I suppose I'm kind of set in my ways, but I tell you there's no use in trying to smooth things over. The truth is bound to come out sooner or later,

and you might as well let it come first as last. That's the way I look at it."

Dr. Burbank let the subject drop. He realized the utter uselessness of arguing with the opinionated old veterinary.

"Anyway," he said, "you know something about horses, if you don't know anything about boys. What are we going to do with the colt?"

The veterinary disregarded the implied rebuke, and paid attention only to the question. "Prob'ly we'll have to shoot her," he replied.

Dr. Burbank winced.

"I wun't say so for sure yet, though," continued the veterinary. "I'd give her another day or two to pull herself together."

Dr. Burbank's face brightened.

"But don't be gettin' too hopeful. Her chances are awful slim." With this parting shot, as if ashamed of his weakness in giving the colt two more days of grace, the old man turned gloomily away, washed his hands at the watering tub, and left the stable with a grunt of farewell.

Dr. Burbank and Josh Thibber remained looking at the colt. She moved restlessly, as

if trying to rise, then sank into the straw with a curious gurgling sound in her throat, very nearly a groan.

"I should think you'd take old Doc Wragg around with you to cheer up your patients," said Josh. "He's such a pleasant, cheerful chap."

"I wish he hadn't said that before Jimmy," said the doctor.

Josh made no answer, but shook his head solemnly.

"It's hard enough on the boy to be a cripple," the doctor continued, talking as much to himself as to Josh, "without having it rubbed in. He's thin-skinned, too, Jimmy is. Naturally it would remind him of his own trouble to see the colt. But that old walrus, Wragg, goes right ahead and makes it ten times worse by calling her a weak-kneed sister,—the old fool."

Such heated words from the mouth of the usually urbane doctor showed Josh the depth of his anger and anxiety.

"I'll hitch up my old mare and take the

boy for a ride," he suggested. "Maybe it'll do him good."

"Will you, Josh? That's nice of you," said the doctor, his mood lightening as his thoughts turned from the veterinary. "But listen," he added, "don't let him talk about the colt, and don't talk to him about her. Keep his mind off her if you can."

"Leave it to me, Doc. I'll take him out in the country after chestnuts. I never yet knew a boy that wasn't happy under a bearin' chestnut tree."

The doctor actually smiled as he closed the doors of the colt's box stall, and heard the enthusiastic camaraderie with which Josh was suggesting the chestnut expedition to Jimmy outside the stable.

Josh Thibber was Dr. Burbank's favorite crony. In those far-away days when Dr. Burbank had first settled in the village, Josh Thibber had been proprietor of a livery stable. When automobiles began to supplant horses, Josh had seen his business getting less and less prosperous, and finally he had fallen into line and converted his stable into a garage.

But automobiles had never supplanted horses in his heart, and although he was the local agent for one of the most popular cars on the market, he seldom rode in one except to demonstrate it to a prospective customer. He still preferred to ride behind his old mare.

It was a mutual love for horses, to some extent, that made him and the doctor inseparable companions. But more than that, they had a mutual admiration for each other; understood each other's thoughts and moods. Both were sentimentalists, and both sentimental about the same things. Yet both were undemonstrative, hiding their sentiment behind masks of Yankee composure. With their masks, of course, they failed to deceive each other in the least, however much they may have deceived others, but neither one would have given way to a frank burst of emotion in the presence of the other under any circumstances. It was part of the code to pretend to be unemotional. But each knew the other was pretending. That was the real explanation of their friendship.

And so Josh, eager to ease the doctor's mind, stopped in front of the bench where Jimmy

was sitting and coaxed him to go after chestnuts.

Jimmy had been communing silently with his dog, Hezekiah, but the silent communion had been a little too peaceful to retain Hezekiah's interest, and he now lay snoring blissfully at Jimmy's feet. Hezekiah was a rather undersized, black-and-white bulldog,—or, at least, mostly bulldog, though nobody ever made any claims as to his pedigree. At any rate, he was Jimmy's dog, and whatever his ancestry, Jimmy would not have exchanged him for any half dozen blue-ribbon winners in the country.

Josh, wise in the way of a boy's heart, opened negotiations by reaching down and patting Hezekiah gently on the head. The snoring ceased and the dog blinked his eyes happily and rose leisurely to his feet. Josh grinned, and continued to pet the dog.

"What do you say," he began, "if we hitch up my old mare, take Hezekiah, and go up to Old Man Brown's woods after some chestnuts?"

Jimmy, sitting with his chin cupped in his

hands, and his elbows on his knees, looked up and forced himself to smile. He understood perfectly well that Josh was suggesting this expedition in an attempt to make him forget the misery into which Dr. Wragg's blunt speech had thrown him.

"You bet," he said, struggling to his feet with the aid of his canes.

As a matter of fact the thought of going after chestnuts did not particularly appeal to him in his present mood. He would have preferred to wander away with Hezekiah to some remote spot where he would be sure of solitude, and there give himself up to self-pitying despair, with only the friendly dog to see him. But already he was learning the rules of the game of life, as it was played by his father and Josh, and he pretended to be enthusiastic about the venture in order not to disappoint Josh.

"It's a go, then," said Josh. "And what a tanning we'll get if Old Man Brown catches us in his woods."

Old Man Brown was known as the crabbedest farmer in town. He had a great aversion

to boys and dogs, and had more than once been known to bring out a big horsewhip to keep them off his property. Josh knew all this, and had chosen Old Man Brown's woods deliberately, because he knew that when the tang of fall is in the air it awakens the zest for adventure in a boy's heart, and he wanted to give his proposal the fullest possible measure of appeal.

"What a tanning he'll give us," he repeated, chuckling.

"Won't he, though?" said Jimmy, but to save his life he could not put any real excitement into his voice, for his mind was still on the colt and his own infirmities; and, besides, he knew that Old Man Brown would never dare to bring out his horsewhip when Josh Thibber was in the marauding party.

But when they had the mare hitched up in the buggy, and Josh handed him the reins, he began to feel better. And when they got out into the country, where he could let the mare out, his spirits rose still higher. The swift, steady beat of the horse's hoofs on the gravel road was like comforting music in his ears, and

the cool breeze that played about his face seemed intent on making him realize that it was fall, the season of apples and chestnuts and invigorating sports.

And now—as often happened when he was driving a spirited horse—Jimmy forgot his own deformity in the excitement of a burst of speed by the mare. Racing along the road, it was as though he himself were running. His whole consciousness was absorbed in the mare's steady trot. He was aware of Hezekiah, running beside the carriage with his tongue out, but this only added to the feeling that he, too, was running. His eyes sparkled with the joy of living.

"Guess the old mare's got a little life in her yet," said Josh, pleased at the boy's excitement.

"I'll say she has," said Jimmy. "There's a farmer up ahead. Watch us pass that old plug of his. He'll think he's tied."

The farmer showed only a mild interest as they passed, but Jimmy yelled with glee.

A long hill put an end to the burst of speed, and as the mare slowed down, Jimmy's excite-

ment faded, and his mind turned back to the colt.

"Josh," he said, "will the colt get better?"

"Well, it's pretty hard to say," replied Josh, wracking his brain for some way to turn the subject.

"Will it always be crippled, even if it lives?" pursued the boy.

"You can't tell," said Josh. "I knew of a horse once that started out that way and grew up to be as sound and strong as you'd ask. But on the other hand—well, you can't tell much about it."

He broke off into the generalization as he saw a way to escape further discussion of the painful subject. "Here we are almost up to Old Man Brown's," he hurried on. "Drive slow, and we'll see if he's around anywhere."

Jimmy understood that it made Josh uncomfortable to be forced to talk about the colt, and he made no further conversation along that line. Instead he simulated great interest in the perilous sport of gathering chestnuts.

They drove past the farm, and tied the horse to a fence near the woods. It was not easy

for Jimmy to make his way through the woods, handicapped as he was, but he plugged along manfully, plying his canes with vim, while Josh loitered along behind and Hezekiah ran ahead, with numerous little side excursions into the thicket.

They filled their pockets with chestnuts without mishap, and drove back to the village munching on them. But Jimmy could not regain the self-abandon that he had felt before, even though Josh's mare strove even harder for speed on the way home than she had when headed away from home. The boy's mind was still on the colt.

And so it remained after he returned home. He tried to conceal his preoccupation from his father and mother, and they pretended not to notice it. But nevertheless he was the topic of many conferences between them, and all the conferences ended in the same decision: "The best thing to do is to avoid talking about it, and let him forget it."

But in the meantime the colt was still in the stable, and still showing no signs of improvement. Once the doctor found Jimmy look-

ing into the stall, and so intent on his thoughts that he did not hear his father's steps behind him. The doctor pretended not to pay much attention, but it brought him to a resolution.

When old Dr. Wragg appeared a few days later, and gave it as his judgment that the colt should be shot, Dr. Burbank, remembering his resolution, was ready to take the advice.

"She just might get well and be all right," the veterinary admitted, "but it ain't likely. The chances are you'd have a weak-kneed sister on your hands as long as you let her live. So you can keep her if you want to, but if 'twas me I'd put her away."

Dr. Burbank said he would think it over for a day or two, but his mind was really made up. If there had not been Jimmy to consider, he would have kept the colt longer on the chance of recovery. But just so long as the colt was in the stable, he argued to himself, it would be a reminder to his son of his own misfortune.

It was a disappointing end of his dreams. Old Nettie, after all, would have to go to her reward without leaving a successor behind her.

The very day after the veterinary had pronounced his judgment, Dr. Burbank called him on the telephone. He had just come into the house, and in his mind was a picture of Jimmy as he had just seen him, sitting on the bench, stroking Hezekiah's head, obviously lost in gloomy thoughts.

"Hello, Wragg?" he said. "Burbank speaking. I've decided to let her go. Come around and get her to-morrow, will you?"

He leaned his head on his hand, and closed his eyes as he hung up the receiver.

CHAPTER III

PLAYING THE GAME

JIMMY sat on the bench, stroking Hezekiah's head. As he saw it, there were three things that might happen to the colt. It might die. He understood that plainly, despite the attempts of his father and Josh to appear cheerful about it in his presence. Or it might live and always be a cripple, like himself. That seemed quite likely. Or, again, it might get well. Josh had said that he knew a horse to do that once. But perhaps Josh had been drawing on his imagination in his effort to gloss things over.

Such were the thoughts running through the boy's head as the doctor talked over the telephone to the veterinary. The doctor was settling the fate of the colt in a manner that had not even occurred to Jimmy.

"Hezekiah," said Jimmy, "let's go for a walk."

The dog recognized his name being spoken. To him there was nothing incongruous in being called Hezekiah. It had been a whim of the doctor's to call him by this unwieldy name, and he had been Hezekiah from puppyhood. He answered to the name as unquestioningly as another dog might answer to the name of Spot or Pal, and the town had long since forgotten to think it funny that a dog should be called Hezekiah.

And now, as Jimmy lifted himself to his feet, Hezekiah emitted a couple of sharp barks in token of his satisfaction at being invited to go somewhere, and followed at Jimmy's heels, as the boy limped down the driveway to the street.

Jimmy was not going anywhere in particular. He simply felt impelled to move around. If he could only throw away his despised canes and run down the street, with Hezekiah chasing joyously after him, he would never complain of anything else as long as he lived, he thought. But he knew that he would never

run—would never throw away the canes, unless it was to replace them with new ones. Why was life so unfair to him?

It was seldom that Jimmy thus gave way to self-pity. It had been so long since he had been able to run and play with other boys that he remembered those days only vaguely. Most of the time now it seemed quite natural that he should have to depend on his canes, and he allowed himself to be as little troubled about it as possible.

But yet he was a boy, and had a boy's heart in him, and there were times when no amount of philosophy could prevent him from feeling the heavy weight that had been placed upon him. There was, for instance, Preston Gilligan.

Preston Gilligan was just Jimmy's age, was in his class at school, and had grown up with him. But he was the worst thorn in Jimmy's flesh.

A strong, active boy, with a domineering turn of mind, Preston had made himself a leader in all kinds of sports—legitimate and illegitimate. He had gained his leadership

solely by superior strength, and he knew it. Of popularity, in the sense of being liked by his fellows, he had none. Other boys did as he told them because they were afraid to do otherwise. He had established his physical superiority several times when one boy or another had summoned up the courage to defy his edicts.

Thus Preston had come to have nothing but contempt for those who were weaker than he. And the weaker they were, the greater was his contempt.

Now Jimmy, being a cripple, was naturally the weakest boy of the lot. Preston's contempt for him, therefore, was great. It was aggravated, furthermore, by the fact that Jimmy, despite his infirmity, was just as popular with the other boys as he, himself, was unpopular. He made it a point, therefore, to lose no opportunity of displaying his superiority to Jimmy, and the easiest way to do that was to take advantage of the latter's helplessness, which he did not scruple to do.

Preston Gilligan, it will be seen, was not the least reason why Jimmy occasionally com-

plained against the fate that had robbed him of his strength.

And now, as Jimmy plodded laboriously along the main street of the village, with Hezekiah frisking around him, he was overtaken by Preston with several other boys of their age, all dressed in football togs. Preston carried a football under his arm.

"Hi, Jimmy," the boys said, slowing down to his pace.

" 'Lo, fellers," said Jimmy.

"Come on. What do you think this is—a funeral?" shouted Preston to his colleagues, as he strode on ahead.

But the other boys refused to be hurried. They were eager for the sport, but they liked Jimmy, and they had seen Preston make him suffer too often. They remained behind with him.

"We're goin' to have a practice game," explained one of the boys. Then, with a doubtful glance at Preston: "C'm'on down and be the lineman."

Ordinarily Jimmy would have been delighted to take even such a noncombative part

as that of the lineman in the game, but to-day it failed to arouse any spark of enthusiasm in him. To-day he wanted to be in the game, to rush the ball through the opposing line, to kick the goal. The thought of carrying a stick up and down the side of the field while the other boys scrambled with the ball was bitter. It brought home to him the fact that he never could take a more active part. He was a weak-kneed sister.

"Come on, come on," shouted Preston. "We'll get some old lady to be lineman."

Jimmy, stung by the jibe, determined not to let it be seen that he was hurt. He would accept the lowly commission offered him by the boys, even though he would prefer to go walking with Hezekiah. It would show Preston that he didn't care—even though he did.

"Sure," said Jimmy, "I'd like to. You fellers go ahead down, and I'll be right along."

The boys quickened their steps, and rejoined the impatient Preston. Jimmy stumped along with Hezekiah. He sighed heavily as one of the boys ran out into the road, and

made a perfect catch of a long forward pass from Preston.

Sometimes even Hezekiah annoyed him, with his frisky antics. When this mood was on him —this mood of rebellion against fate—he didn't like to watch exhibitions of physical alertness. The dog sprinting down the road seemed to be saying, "Don't you wish you could do this?" The dog sauntering slowly back to him seemed to be saying, "I suppose I'll have to come back to you, but if you were like other boys you would be running with me."

Yet the look in the dog's eyes didn't say anything like that, and Jimmy knew it. What the dog's eyes said was: "The most fun about running down the street is that I know you are right there behind me, and I can turn around any time and find you watching me and waiting for me." How was the dog to know that his running sometimes made this boy, whom he worshipped, wish that he could run, too?

"Here, Hezekiah," said Jimmy, bracing himself on one of his canes as the dog leaped

up at his invitation and placed his forepaws on the boy's leg. "You're a good dog," said Jimmy, patting his head. "Run all you want to."

To emphasize his meaning, Jimmy pulled a stick from his pocket, hissed at it through his teeth, and tossed it in the air. "Go get it, Hezekiah," he yelled.

The dog ran madly after the stick, barking enthusiastically. He seized it between his teeth, and trotted back to Jimmy with it. Jimmy took it from his teeth and tossed it again, and again Hezekiah retrieved it.

"There," said Jimmy, "we can't play any more. I told the boys I'd be lineman." He put the stick back in his pocket, and resumed his plodding gait, with Hezekiah trotting along ahead.

Arriving at the vacant lot that served as a football field, Jimmy found the boys just ready to start their game. There were only six on a side, but this could not lessen the importance of the game to the combatants. Preston was kicking off. The ball sailed through the air.

The vacant lot was a makeshift gridiron.

No white lines marked its limits. The goal posts had once done service in a nearby garden as bean poles. But it served its purpose.

As lineman, it was Jimmy's job to gauge as nearly as possible the number of yards gained in each play, and to decide when one side or the other made a first down. Lacking any exact instruments of measure, he knew that his decisions would be protested often. And he knew, too, from past experience, that his inability to race up and down the field when there were long runs was an added handicap. But these very handicaps made his part in the game interesting. It was as much of a struggle for him to follow the plays up and down the field as it was for some other boy to plug the line.

And now, arriving just as Preston kicked the ball, he walked as fast as his crippled legs would let him in the direction in which the ball was sailing. A boy tried to catch it, but failed. The ball bumped along the ground. Another boy picked it up and started to run, but was quickly tackled and thrown down.

Jimmy hurried as fast as he could, but the

ball was in play before he could get a stick in the ground opposite the place where the tackle had been made. But Hezekiah had arrived in time, and Jimmy placed the stick where the dog had been standing. Hezekiah was an able assistant.

The game proceeded. Preston made the first touchdown, and failed to kick the goal. Later the other side tied the score. Jimmy, moving up and down the field with Hezekiah, called out the first downs. Several times his decisions were protested, usually by Preston, but nothing came of the protests.

The game was nearing its end, when Preston got away for a long run. One of his opponents, in hot pursuit, managed to grapple him and throw him when he had about fifteen yards still to go for a touchdown. Jimmy hurried down the field to mark the down, but again the ball was in play before he arrived. Again he judged the position of the ball by Hezekiah, and the play went on.

"First down, eight yards to go," he yelled as the play stopped.

"Second down, five yards to go."

"Third down, three yards to go."

It was an important moment. If Preston's side made this first down, a touchdown seemed inevitable. If not, the other side would kick out of danger, and the game probably would end before the ball could be placed in a scoring position again.

Preston called the signals. The ball was snapped to him, and he plunged forward. The boys of the other side rushed in to stop his charge. He was tackled. But had he made his first down? The boys looked at Jimmy.

Jimmy fully realized the importance of his decision. He was tempted to declare against the first down, just to get even with Preston for his many jibes of the past. But he overcame the temptation, and walked back to the stick that marked the beginning of the play. Deliberately he paced out the distance from the stick. If Preston had made the first down, he would give it to him. If not, he would give the other side the ball.

One—two—three—four—five—six—seven eight—nine. He shook his head. "Badgers' ball," he announced. "First down."

Preston's side had failed.

"What do ya mean, Badgers' ball?" yelled Preston. "I made that first down." He walked belligerently to the sideline.

"No, you didn't," Jimmy insisted. "Measure it out yourself."

"Measure nothing. You weren't even down here when the last first down started. The stick is wrong. I knew we'd ought to have had an old lady for lineman. Why don't you get a wheel chair?"

Jimmy winced, but stuck doggedly to his decision. "Hezekiah was there," he said.

"Yeah," mocked Preston. "Hezekiah was there. Hezekiah'd make a better lineman than you do. He can at least move faster'n a mud turtle."

The other boys, including those on Preston's side, began to try to pull him away. "Aw c'm'on," they urged. "Jimmy's all right. Come and finish the game."

"All right?" shouted Preston. "What's right about him? He's just about as all right as that fine colt his father's got. They ought

to do the same thing to him they're goin' to do to the colt."

"What do you mean?" asked Jimmy, quickly. "What are they going to do to her?"

"Oh, you don't know?" shouted Preston, gloatingly. "They didn't tell you about it, I suppose, because you might be afraid they'd do the same to you. And they ought to, too."

"What are they going to do?" pleaded Jimmy. "Tell me, will you?"

"Sure, I'll tell you. They're goin' to shoot her; that's what they're goin' to do. If they didn't, she never would be any good, any more'n you are."

"Oh," said Jimmy.

There seemed to be a bucket of lead in the pit of his stomach.

"Badgers' ball, first down," he said.

CHAPTER IV

INTERVENTION

DR. BURBANK had kept from Jimmy the news that the colt was going to be shot, because he wanted to shield the boy from further mental pain. He thought the best way to deal with the case was to let the veterinary quietly take the colt away and let that be the end of it. He didn't know what he would tell Jimmy if the boy asked questions, but he hoped to be able to avoid the subject. Once the colt had been out of sight for a little while, he hoped it would be out of mind, too, and that Jimmy eventually would forget the whole unfortunate situation.

It had not occurred to the doctor that somebody else might tell Jimmy the news in a way that would be infinitely more painful than if he had told him himself. He had cautioned Mrs. Burbank and Josh Thibber against talking

about it. Nobody else would know about it, he thought.

But over on the vacant lot where the boys played football, Preston Gilligan had blurted out the news to Jimmy in a way that was calculated to hurt—and did hurt. Now, of course, Preston had no way of knowing that Dr. Burbank had called Dr. Wragg on the telephone only an hour before and told him to come and get the colt. But he did know that his father had been talking about the colt that very morning, and had expressed the conviction that Dr. Burbank would have to have the colt shot. That had been information enough for Preston, when he needed a weapon with which to wound the offending lineman who had ruled against him.

Having delivered that verbal blow, Preston was willing to finish out the remaining few minutes of the game. He knew that the blow had hurt, even though Jimmy had tried to conceal the pain by calling for the resumption of play. When the game ended in a tie, Preston felt none the less victorious. He reasoned to himself that Jimmy's decision had prevented

his side from winning the game, and he had been victorious over Jimmy. And so long as he could feel himself victorious, he was satisfied.

Jimmy did not doubt the truth of what Preston said about the colt. He wondered that he had not suspected it himself.

So they were going to kill the weak-kneed sister. That was why his father and Josh had been so reticent. He pondered the matter deeply as he walked slowly home with the dog Hezekiah.

Now Jimmy's feelings in regard to the colt were entirely different from what his father supposed. To be sure, the sight and thought of the helpless creature reminded him of his own infirmities, but this did not arouse his antipathy to this colt. On the contrary, it aroused his sympathy. Instead, he felt peculiarly drawn to her, because they had something in common. Their mutual affliction was a strong bond between them, he thought.

He had always borne a kindly feeling toward horses. To old Nettie, in particular, he had accorded the reverent worship that is the

due of a lesser family deity. But he never felt toward any horse as he now felt toward the crippled colt. He had been prepared to welcome a miniature replica of old Nettie, but he had found the colt more akin to himself than to the stalwart old mare that had brought her into the world.

Even the dog Hezekiah, though losing no whit of Jimmy's affection, had not quite the appeal of the crippled creature. Hezekiah was a devoted companion, ever ready to respond to the boy's changing moods. But, after all, Hezekiah was in the full possession of all his physical faculties. He could respect the boy's moods, but he could hardly share them. The colt, Jimmy thought, would know what it means to be handicapped by a physical infirmity. There would be a communion of feeling between them.

Jimmy saw only one course open to him, that was to plead for the colt's life. From his own experience he knew that the life of a cripple has many hard moments. Yet he had found life more often pleasant than otherwise, and the thought of arbitrarily cutting short a life,

even that of a horse, sent a shudder through his frame.

And here was a horse that had come to mean more to him than even his dog. And they were planning to kill her—his sister in misfortune, his weak-kneed sister. They should not do it. They could not do it. He would prevent it. His mind turned to extravagant methods of rescue, in case his father refused to heed the plea that he was determined to make. He tried to figure out a way to get the animal out of the stable, hide her, and take care of her until the danger was over. But in the back of his head he knew that all such plans must fail. He knew that all depended on his plea for mercy.

Yet with the romanticism of youth he continued to picture himself spiriting the colt into some wilderness or other, as he entered the house, perfunctorily washed his face and hands at the kitchen sink, and sat down to supper. His mother, experienced in reading his moods and feelings by his face and actions, knew that he was brooding about something. She sensed an unhappiness, probably brought on by some

incident of the afternoon. But she knew that he had been spending an active afternoon, and activity in boys leads to hunger. Therefore she gave no indication of the fact that she knew he was feeling melancholy, but bustled in and out of the kitchen with hot and savory dishes.

"There!" she said, setting a large and luscious chicken pie in the center of the table. "I guess that will taste good to you, Jimmy-boy."

"Fine," said Jimmy, making a weak attempt to smile, but hardly realizing what he was talking about.

The doctor came in and took his seat at the table. He served Mrs. Burbank, and turned to Jimmy. "Well, sir," said he, "I suppose you want about a ton of this, hey?"

"I'm not very hungry," replied the boy.

Mrs. Burbank looked across the table at her husband, as if to say: "Don't urge him. Let the pie do it." The doctor accordingly served his son generously, without further words, and Jimmy took the plate in silence.

Chicken pie was one of his favorite dishes. But to-night he felt no interest in it. He

dabbled in it with his fork, and forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls. But it seemed to stick in his throat. He couldn't remember ever feeling so disturbed. He made up his mind to speak, and have it over with.

"Dad, what are you going to do with the colt?"

The doctor cleared his throat. He had been afraid that the colt was the cause of Jimmy's obvious despondency, but he had hoped the subject could be avoided until the veterinary had come and taken her away. Fervently he wished the colt had never been born. But he knew he must give some answer.

"I guess we'll have to send her away for a while," he replied, trying to appear nonchalant.

"Where?"

"Why, Dr. Wragg is coming after her tomorrow, and take her somewhere," the doctor parried.

"Dad, is he going to kill her?"

The point-blank question took the doctor by surprise. He turned his eyes down to his

plate, wondering how the boy had surmised the truth.

"Why—why—I'm afraid he'll have to, Jimmy," he said.

"No, dad, please. You can't let him do that. I—" He felt the tears coming to his eyes, despite all efforts to restrain them, and his voice choked up.

The doctor was silent. He wanted to speak, but didn't know what to say. Mrs. Burbank looked at Jimmy with concern, trying to think how she could break the tension without making matters worse. Nobody made any pretense of continuing to eat.

Finally Jimmy himself broke the silence, his voice half-choked, his body shaking with uncontrollable sobs. "You can't; you can't," he muttered. "I won't let you kill her."

"There, there," said his mother, soothingly. "We didn't realize you'd feel so badly about it. Maybe we won't have to do it, after all."

But the doctor shook his head at her. This outbreak of feeling, he reasoned, only proved more conclusively that the colt would be a source of unhappiness as long as it was

allowed to remain in the stable. He hated to see Jimmy suffer, but he thought it better to have the pangs over once for all, rather than let them drag along for days and years.

"It's no fun to have a tooth pulled," he often told his patients, "but when it's out there's an end to it." The familiar philosophy was working in his head now, as he signalled to his wife to let him have the floor.

"Well, you see, Jimmy," he began, clearing his throat again, "it's this way: She can't get well. At least, old Doc Wragg doesn't think she can. And so—."

"Neither can I," cried Jimmy, unable to control his words longer. "Why don't you have me shot, too?"

"Jimmy!" screamed his mother, jumping up from her chair and rushing to his side. "How can you say such things?"

Tears streamed down her cheeks, as she embraced her son. "Jimmy, Jimmy," she repeated.

The doctor, shaken out of his philosophy by the intensity of the boy's feeling, groped

vainly for words. "I'll tell Wragg I've changed my mind," he said, at last.

"Will you, dad? Will you?" Jimmy sat up eagerly in his chair, a smile breaking through his tears. He struggled to hold back the sobs. He brushed his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Of course he will, dear," said his mother, patting him affectionately. "Now eat some supper."

"Dad, will you give her to me?" Jimmy persisted.

Again the doctor cleared his throat to gain time. He had hoped that one concession would be enough. He had thought that Jimmy might reconcile himself to the loss of the colt after a little while. But he knew that this was no time for reservations.

"Yes, I will give her to you," said the doctor.

"Thank you, dad," said Jimmy. Then apologetically: "I'm sorry to have made such a fuss, but she's so much like me—you know."

"Now then," said his mother, "everything's all right again. Won't you eat your chicken pie now?"

"Sure," said Jimmy.

He attacked the pie with real zest for the first time. The colt was his. And yet, while it had been her weakness that had drawn him to her, he nursed the hope that she would eventually get over her affliction.

"Dad," he said, "Josh said he knew a colt once that was like this one and got to be as strong as anything."

"I suppose it might happen that way," the doctor admitted, "but you mustn't let your hopes run away with you."

"Anyway," said Jimmy, "I'm going to take care of her a while and see."

The doctor nodded, with a faint smile of encouragement. He was not quite sure that he had been wise in reversing his decision.

"What are you going to name her, Jimmy?" his mother asked.

Jimmy considered it a minute, munching his food as he thought.

"I guess," he said, at last, "that I will just call her 'Weak-Kneed Sister.' "

CHAPTER V

A QUESTION OF NURSES

THE old veterinary was very scornful when Dr. Burbank called him on the telephone that night and told him he had changed his mind. But as the doctor went on to explain that Jimmy had pleaded for the colt's life, and he had given her to him as a present, the veterinary changed his tone.

"Wa'l, it's very foolish, very foolish," he said, at last, "but I'll tell you what I'll do. If the boy is bound to raise up that colt, bum legs and all, I'll do all I can to help him. I'll drop around to-morrow."

When he arrived, next day, Dr. Wragg was as cheerful as the morning sun. He patted Jimmy on the back in his best fatherly manner. "We'll see what we can do with this critter of yours," he promised.

As a matter of fact, he was well pleased

with the turn of events. He had given what he believed to be his best professional advice about the colt, and as the advice had been of an unpleasant nature, he had swathed himself in gruffness as he gave it. It was the nature of the man thus to hide his own softness of heart. He had to hide it from himself as well as from others.

But now he had given his advice, and his advice had been—at first—accepted. It had then been overruled, not on its merits, but to satisfy the sentimental whim of a crippled boy. And he was glad of it. The blunt old man was by no means immune from sentiment himself, although he had fought against it all his life, considering it his besetting sin.

He gave Jimmy detailed instructions as to the care of his charge. The impotent limbs were to be gently massaged, tenderly bathed and anointed with a certain pungent-smelling balm which he produced from the depths of his kit. Exceptional care as to feeding and bedding, of course, would be required. A tonic was prescribed for her. And every day Jimmy was to try to get her on her feet, that she

might get exercise as soon as her legs would hold her up.

As he gave his instructions, the old man became almost optimistic about the case. "Maybe we'll pull her together yet," he ventured. But then he caught himself. He remembered that he was a pessimist—that it was his mission in life to make people face the hard, cold facts. He tried to think of a remark sufficiently cold-blooded to offset the other one. The best he could do was: "But don't expect too much and you'll never be disappointed."

"Silly old fool," he called himself mentally, for letting the boy's enthusiasm affect his reason.

Jimmy did all the veterinary told him to do, and more. He gave himself up completely to the care of the colt. No baby could have received more attention than the crippled boy lavished on the crippled horse.

On the whitewashed door of her stall he painted her name in big red letters, with some paint that had been left over from some household job. The veterinary, on his second visit since Jimmy assumed ownership, was consid-

erably taken aback to see the words on the door—the words in which he had spoken his scorn of the unfortunate animal: "Weak-Kneed Sister." Jimmy started calling her "Sister" for short.

The dog Hezekiah was inclined to be a little jealous of Sister at first. Hitherto he had been Jimmy's boon companion, and now his place was being usurped by this helpless, gangling creature. Once or twice, when Jimmy was in Sister's stall fussing over her, Hezekiah had tried to distract his attention and draw him away by devious little tricks, such as rubbing against him and tugging at his coat, but Jimmy had appeared not to be aware of his existence at all. Then he had tried barking, and Jimmy had spoken sharply to him, fearing lest he frighten the colt. After that Hezekiah had held his peace.

But Hezekiah soon discovered that outside Sister's stall Jimmy was just the same toward him as formerly. And, after all, he was outside more than in. Furthermore, Hezekiah found that he was perfectly welcome inside the

sacred stall, so long as he did not interfere with Jimmy's activities in behalf of the colt.

He became reconciled to the situation. Had it been another dog that was seizing a share of his young master's affection, he might have taken it more to heart. But Sister was only a helpless colt. It was impossible to hold a grudge against her. Before long, in fact, the dog found himself sharing his master's interest in the colt. She seemed to recognize him when he came into the stall with Jimmy, and he felt a patronizing fondness for her, as he stretched himself out comfortably in the straw and supervised things—or fell asleep—while Jimmy applied Dr. Wragg's pungent-smelling ointment.

The veterinary and the dog were not Jimmy's only associates in the work of caring for the colt. Dr. Burbank, though an extraordinarily busy man, found time to give his son a hand now and again, and held many conferences with him during the evenings, as to the best means of nursing her to strength. Mrs. Burbank, too, took an active interest, and supplied the boy with soft cloths and other needed

materials, as well as with good, motherly encouragement.

But perhaps the most valued assistant of all was Josh Thibber. Jimmy suspected sometimes that Josh knew even more about horses than Dr. Wragg. It had been Josh's remark about a similar case, when they were out on their chestnut expedition, that had first encouraged him to believe that Sister might get well. Since then Josh had renewed his courage again and again, and also had given him many valuable bits of advice.

Josh really believed that the colt would gain her strength. The case of which he had told Jimmy had been an actuality, not a pleasant fiction for the sake of easing the boy's mind. Before Dr. Burbank had given the colt to Jimmy, Josh had gone to the veterinary and argued with him about the advisability of shooting her. He had argued that it would do no harm to keep her alive long enough to find out for certain whether or not she would ever be able to use her legs. Finding Dr. Wragg firm in his pessimism, Josh had refrained from making matters worse by ex-

pressing his opinion to Dr. Burbank. But now that things had turned out as he had hoped, he was eager to see his opinion vindicated.

When the fall term of high school opened, forcing Jimmy to pass less time at his self-imposed task of nursing the colt, Josh took it upon himself to act as first assistant.

"I'll just look in on her now and then, while you're at school," he told Jimmy; and after that hardly a day passed but Josh appeared in the stable once during the forenoon and once during the afternoon, to see that all was well with the patient. He had never cared very much about his automobile business anyway, and this gave him an excuse to slip away and leave things to his assistant, who, as Josh said, had "mechanical leanin's."

Jimmy, coming out of school these afternoons, had never begrudged the other boys their physical prowess more than when he saw them running at top speed down the school yard and up the street. If he could only run like that, he told himself, it would be only a matter of few minutes before he was in the

stable. But with his handicap it took him nearly half an hour to walk home, speculating all the way on whether or not he might find the colt on her feet at last when he reached the stable.

Hezekiah usually met him in the school yard and accompanied him home. This custom had begun the year before, after the dog, trotting aimlessly about the streets, had discovered the place and approximate time of Jimmy's daily reappearance. Jimmy had been highly elated at this display of cleverness by Hezekiah, and had been in the habit of looking forward to the walk home with his dog, as the closing hours of the school day dragged on.

But now even Hezekiah was unable to make the walk home pleasant. For Jimmy was in too much of a hurry. Always there was the possibility that this might be the day when the colt would take her important first step. Always the boy's imaginative mind was conjuring up visions of the colt needing his immediate attention. And yet he could not hurry. His mind ran on ahead, but his legs

were like so much lead, holding him back to a snail's pace.

Hezekiah was aware that these reunions with his master were not the joyous occasions that they used to be. But he was a true dog, and worshipped his master with single-minded devotion none the less. He was accustomed to accepting the boy's moods without question, and making the best of them. Now, therefore, he was the most acceptable companion Jimmy could have had as he made his impatiently slow way homeward.

Preston Gilligan, who was in Jimmy's class in high school, soon learned of the fate of the colt, much to Jimmy's regret. For Preston, naturally unsympathetic and domineering, had become even more bullying than ever in his attitude toward his crippled classmate since the day when, as he believed, Jimmy's awkwardness had cost his side a victory at football.

Preston, probably, was no more self-centered than many another boy of his age, but his natural vigor of body and spirit had brought him recognition as a leader, and this

recognition had so stimulated his pride and selfishness that he had lost all regard for the feelings of others.

He half suspected that it was his own words at the football game that had caused Jimmy to intercede for the colt's life,—which was true,—and this did not please him. His sole motive in bringing up the subject that day had been to taunt Jimmy, and now all the sting had been taken out of the taunt. This seemed to mock his superiority, and he was angry.

He began at once a campaign of sneering and jibing. "Oh, look," he would say, as Jimmy stumped into the school yard with the help of his canes, "here comes the horse-nurse."

One afternoon, at the end of school, the boys came hurrying out of the schoolhouse, with Jimmy limping behind them. Outside, Hezekiah was waiting, as usual. Preston and some of the other boys stopped in the yard to discuss plans for another football game, and Hezekiah, ever a friendly creature, trotted up

to them, sniffing interestedly, as he waited for his master to appear.

Preston, picking up a stick, lifted it to his mouth and made a hissing sound with his teeth, then waved it over his head and threw it down the yard. Hezekiah, understanding the game fully, barked gleefully and ran after the stick, picked it up in his teeth, and trotted back to Preston with it.

The boy was about to repeat the performance, when Jimmy emerged from the door and whistled at the dog. Hezekiah hesitated a moment doubtfully, his eye still on the stick in Preston's hand. Jimmy, seeing what was going on, waved a hand permittingly.

"Go ahead, throw it," he called.

But Preston only continued to wave the stick in the air, while Hezekiah, understanding Jimmy's permission, followed it eagerly with his eyes, barked, and wagged his tail excitedly.

"No, I guess I'd better let you have the dog, so he can help you get home to nurse your horse," said Preston, attempting to be heavily sarcastic. Then he was struck with

what he thought to be a very bright idea. "You know the difference between you and the dog and the horse?" he asked. And without waiting for a reply, he answered his own question. "The dog has got four good legs; the horse has got four bum ones; and you have only got two bum ones. You'd better give up your job nursing the horse and let the dog nurse the both of you."

Then, instead of throwing the stick, as Hezekiah was expecting him to do, he dropped it to the ground, and almost in the same movement drew back his foot and kicked the dog toward Jimmy. Hezekiah, astonished, angry, and pained, emitted a squeal, spun sharply around, and snapped at his tormentor's ankle. Preston, not expecting any such retaliatory tactics, took to his heels, with the dog in frenzied pursuit.

Jimmy had been watching all this in silent awe. It all happened so quickly that it almost took his breath away. As the chase started, however, the other boys in the yard began shouting at the dog, trying to call him back. The dog paid no heed, but Jimmy did.

He realized that Hezekiah must be stopped. He raised two fingers to his mouth and whistled shrilly.

Hezekiah slowed his pace, then stopped still, though reluctantly, and watched Preston disappear around a corner. He then turned around and trotted back to his master. He looked up at the boy, as if expecting to be reproached, but Jimmy reached down and patted his head reassuringly.

"I don't blame you a bit, Hezekiah," he said. "I think I'd bite him myself if I could."

He grinned at the other boys, who looked at the dog admiringly, but kept their distance, impressed by his display of anger. "Served him right," they agreed.

"If he's my nurse, I guess he's a pretty good one," said Jimmy. "Come on, Hezekiah, you've got another patient at home."

He stumped down to the street, the dog following placidly at his heels. From a window in a nearby store Preston gazed at the pair, muttering under his breath.

CHAPTER VI

SISTER FIGHTS IT OUT

AS the days passed, Jimmy began to lose his optimism about the colt's chances of becoming able-bodied. It was very disheartening to arrive home night after night and find her still huddled on the floor of her stall, helpless as the day she was born.

But his affection for her grew stronger as his hopes weakened. The colt was beginning to know him, and he thought he could detect a greeting in her big, pathetic eyes when he entered the stall. She always looked up at him now, and seemed grateful when he stroked her scrawny neck and adjusted the straw of her bed.

Sister did not know that Jimmy wanted her to gain the use of her legs, but she did know that something within herself was aching for activity. Bred of a strong, speedy strain, her

nerves were not attuned to invalidism. She had never in her short life seen an open road or a grassy pasture, but some strong lure seemed to be calling her; she felt an hereditary urge to trot and gallop, without knowing exactly what it would be like to do these things.

When Josh Thibber came into her stall and tried to help her to her feet, she comprehended that this was the first step toward that vague something for which she yearned. She tried hard to get up and stay up, but the instant Josh's strong arms released their hold on her body, she sank weakly into the straw again, as if her legs had been fashioned of rubber. After two or three such experiments, she began to try to rise by her own strength, but this proved even more futile than her attempts to utilize Josh's help. Yet she didn't give it up. She couldn't give it up. The force of past generations of fleet and active horses was working within her.

At last, after many failures, indomitable will conquered. Exerting all her strength, she felt herself rising to an upright position.

Her stiffened forelegs held firm while hind legs lifted her weight from the floor. For the space of a few seconds she stood on her feet—long enough to emit a shrill, coltish whinny of triumph. Then she crumpled.

But it was a beginning. For a brief moment she had felt the thrill of self-sufficiency. On her feet she had realized more than ever that this was the way to the vague satisfaction that she craved. She rested contentedly in her straw the remainder of that day, and when Jimmy arrived at night he thought she looked tired and wan, and his hopes fell further. The ointment which he rubbed into her tired muscles and joints felt good to Sister that night, but he did not realize that those muscles and joints had earned the soothing balm with which he was anointing them.

The next day and the next Sister repeated her efforts successfully, with nobody the wiser but herself. Josh, finding her looking tired, had not tried to lift her up on those days. On the third day she tried an instinctive step, and found that she could move about by her own strength. After three short and awk-

ward steps she stopped and settled down into her bed again, not because her legs gave way again, but because they were tired from the unaccustomed effort.

On the fourth day of her new-found power Jimmy came clumping into the stable with Hezekiah trotting ahead of him. There was no eagerness in the boy's halting tread as he crossed the stable floor, for he no longer felt the possibility that he might find the colt on her feet. That game had played out. He had begun to wonder, indeed, if he was doing right in prolonging the life of this helpless and suffering creature. Yet he could not bear the thought of giving her up.

With head down, he crossed over to the stall, the upper door of which was open. He looked in, his eyes mechanically seeking the colt on the floor. Then his eyes opened wide, and so did his mouth, but no sound came from it. He seized the top of the bottom door to steady himself, as his canes clattered to the floor. Finally a gasp of surprise and wondering joy came from his throat—a long, drawn out "Oooh."

Sister was standing on her feet. As Jimmy stared joyously into her great eyes, she took a step forward and stuck out her muzzle in greeting. Automatically Jimmy put forth his hand and touched her, but gingerly. He was greatly awe-struck. Sister, apparently satisfied with this gesture, dropped back into her straw.

Then, with the colt back in her accustomed position, Jimmy regained the use of his voice.

"Hezekiah," he yelled, "she's up! she's on her feet!"

The dog, idly exploring a distant corner of the stable, cocked his ear and then trotted to his master, wondering what all the shouting was about.

Jimmy wanted to jump and dance. All the days of tedious care since he took charge of the colt were as nothing. This sudden revelation, just as he was abandoning hope, was like a wonderful dream. Yet he knew it was no dream, but an actuality. The colt was going to be able to use her legs after all.

In his excitement Jimmy forgot that his original interest in the colt had been fostered

by her inability to use her legs—her likeness to him in this respect. Indeed, from the beginning he had hoped that she would overcome her handicap, even though it meant that she would join the rest of his intimates in surpassing him. He could sympathize deeply with creatures who were as badly or worse off than himself, but he could not wish them to remain that way, even to keep him company in misery. Therefore he was overjoyed at what his eyes had seen, and he wanted to leap and dance—but, of course, couldn't.

Instead, he laboriously stooped and picked up his canes, then opened the door of the stall and went in, with Hezekiah following.

"Good girl, good girl," he said, over and over again. "Good old Weak-Kneed Sister. Good girl."

He thought of a dozen things to do, and wanted to do them all at once. He wanted to hurry to his father and mother and to Josh with the news. He wanted to confound Preston Gilligan with it. He wanted to get the colt on her feet again, and lead her out into the street, triumphantly. He even wanted to

hitch her up in a harness at once, though he knew that this was a fantastic impossibility. These and many other things he wanted to do.

But being able to do only one thing at a time, he went methodically to work rubbing ointment on the colt's legs, as he had done every night since he took possession of her.

"Good girl," he continued to repeat. Then to Hezekiah, who was showing signs of dropping off to sleep in a corner: "Don't you understand, Hezekiah? She's all right. She was walking."

But Hezekiah did not understand. He saw nothing unusual. So he went to sleep forthwith, Sister's straw being soft, warm, and comfortable.

Jimmy finished his nightly nursing duties, and then hastened to spread the good news.

The next day being Saturday, he did not have to go to school, and he devoted it almost exclusively to Sister. Josh came over, and Sister obligingly got on her feet again for them. Josh realized that she must have been using her legs several days, and recommended an attempt to give her a little exercise. Ac-

cordingly he and Jimmy closed the stable door and opened the door of her stall, letting her out into the stable. She walked around the floor several times before they persuaded her to go back into her stall for a rest.

Thus Sister began to gain strength, and as the days passed the amount of exercise given her each day was increased. After a little while Jimmy hitched old Nettie into a buggy, and let Sister loose to run along beside for a short drive. He had to keep the old mare down to a walk, however, and even then the colt found it difficult to keep pace with her. Her gait was exceedingly stiff and uncertain.

Later, when the snow fell, Jimmy increased the distances covered in these exercise trips, and Sister showed steady progress. But she was growing very fast now, and it was necessary that the sustaining power of her legs should grow proportionately. Thus the winter passed, with her legs still far from perfect, but becoming more and more normal.

When school closed in the spring, Jimmy prepared to go out to his grandfather's farm

for the summer. His grandfather had been in the village several times during the winter, and was greatly interested in the progress of the colt. Old Nettie's other colt was now his favorite driving horse, and was regarded as a paragon by those who knew horseflesh. The old man, after a careful scrutiny of Sister, had decided that she was a worthy sister to his own steed, despite the handicap under which she started life.

"I cal'late what she needs is a good summer out to pasture," he told Jimmy on one of his visits at the doctor's house. "You better bring her along with ye when ye come out to the farm this summer."

Jimmy had discussed this with Josh and his father, and both had agreed that his grandfather was right. Therefore he and Sister were going to the farm together. Naturally Hezekiah would go, too. That was understood. The triumvirate was getting well-nigh inseparable.

The trip to the farm would be the longest trip Sister had yet made. But she was thoroughly halter-broke now, and could trot a

little at the end of her rope, provided she were not required to keep it up too long, in which case her legs got wobbly and she had to be allowed to rest.

Josh, at the doctor's request, drove out to the farm with Jimmy, while the latter led the colt. They proceeded slowly, with frequent stops for rest, and Sister stood the trip better than they had expected. She was getting, indeed, to be a spirited animal, showing a will and nerve out of all proportion to her still limited abilities. Sister's memory did not carry back to those days when she had lain helpless on the floor of her stall, but the urge that was working in her then was working in her now. She had longed then for some vague activity. Now she was satisfying that longing to a certain extent. She was walking and trotting on the open road. But still there was something more that she craved. She wanted to go faster, faster. Her limbs were not yet the equal of her heart.

"I'll tell you what," said Josh, as they approached the farm.

"What?" asked Jimmy.

"We'll give your grandfather a surprise," said Josh. "We'll drive in with a flourish and show him what the colt can do."

"Sure," said Jimmy.

Thereupon they stopped to give Sister a rest, and then moved forward slowly until they were in sight of the farm. Then Josh clucked to his old mare, and she broke into a trot. Sister accepted the pace willingly, and thus they drove into the farmyard.

Jimmy's grandfather showed surprise enough to repay them well for their trickery. The last time he had seen the colt she was walking with a stiff and awkward gait. Now she came trotting into his yard, not with a perfect stride, to be sure, but yet showing herself to such good advantage that he was genuinely astonished. He stroked his white chin whiskers as he greeted his guests.

"Quite some colt you got there, Jimmy," he commented, dryly. "What ye been doin' to her? She's spry as a mouse."

"Huh," said Jimmy, assuming an air of indifference. "She's not much good. She's just a weak-kneed sister."

His grandfather grinned. "How'd ye like to swap her for a nice barrel of apples?"

"I'll think it over," said Jimmy.

He drew Sister up beside the wagon, and stroked her sleek neck.

"Don't worry, Sister," he said in a stage whisper. "I wouldn't swap you for this whole farm."

CHAPTER VII

ON THE FARM

OLD Enoch Burbank's farm was the pride of the whole county. Whenever men talked of other farms, they compared them with "the Burbank place." Other farms grew barren and were abandoned, but this one flourished and prospered. It was an institution of and by itself, a monument to the old man who had devoted his life to it.

And furthermore it was a delightful place for a boy or a dog or a horse to pass a summer. Its far-flung acres included tracts of timberland, thick-grown, quiet, and solemn; well-kept orchards, abounding in toothsome apples; vast, sweet-smelling hay fields, and acre upon acre of pasture land in which a horse could graze and a dog could romp and a boy could wander.

In one of these great pastures Sister was

let loose to shift for herself with half a dozen other horses. Enoch Burbank had all kinds of horses—big, heavy, muscular beasts for the farm and timber work; smaller and quicker ones for the lighter tasks about the farm; and slender, spirited, speedy animals for driving. The old man had bred many a driving horse which had later gained fame on the race tracks, and two or three of the younger horses with whom Sister was pastured gave promise of developing into race horses.

Sister found her new life among these aristocratic animals exhilarating and pleasant. She soon learned the spots where the grass was the sweetest and most abundant, and passed many hours grazing leisurely and thus building up her strength. But that was not all. There was a great deal of trotting and gamboling to be done. Here she could satisfy to her heart's content that craving for activity which had been gnawing so long at her breast. Or, at least, she could satisfy it as much as her endurance would let her.

Frisking about the pasture with the other

horses, Sister soon found that they all could run faster and longer than she could. This was not pleasant. Several times, when a general migration started late in the afternoon, she was obliged to fall behind the troop, and night overtook her before she could locate her companions. Moreover, there was some instinct always prodding her on, and making her feel dissatisfied when the other horses outdistanced her.

She had, in short, the will to achieve superiority, and as the days passed, her strength, speed, and vigor steadily grew, taking her nearer this goal. The stiffness of joints, brought on by her early troubles, gradually disappeared as she trotted hither and yon through the pasture. Her step became springy and certain, rather than unsteady and heavy as before. The outdoor existence toughened her fibres and sharpened her senses. Nature was shaping her into a self-reliant animal, doing for her what it will do for any other creature that has the courage and strength to overcome obstacles.

But with all these other changes, Sister was

becoming more and more nervous and high-strung, as is the way with wild things. The horse lives on vegetable substances—grass and grains—and thus is not endowed with the instinct to do battle with other animals except in self-protection. So Sister knew that she should avoid the other creatures of the woods and fields, and as her senses sharpened she became quick to flee at the slightest unusual sound or movement. Timidity, it would be called; yet this is an unjust word to use, as the instinct to run away is given to the horse for the same reason that the instinct to pursue is given to animals of prey—self-preservation. The one flees to preserve its life. The other pursues in the hope of sustaining its life by getting food.

But if this obedience to nature be timidity, then Sister was getting more and more timid. And Jimmy, whose chief delight was to make his way through the pasture in the hope of encountering his erstwhile patient, found it correspondingly difficult to find her. For she would hear him approaching, and without

waiting to see who or what he was, would speed away in the opposite direction.

If she saw him before giving way to her impulse to run, however, she would wait for him and allow him to approach and pet her. Nobody else could get near enough to touch her, but she knew Jimmy, trusted him, and enjoyed the comradeship which he bestowed on her.

These were sweet days to Jimmy, as well as to Sister. Here on his grandfather's farm he could find many ways to occupy his time, and thus crowd out of his mind all thought of his afflictions. When not wandering through Sister's pasture, he could build things at his grandfather's work-bench, or go out in the orchard after apples, or ride in the wagon with his grandfather or in the carts or hay-racks with the hired men. The days were full.

And there was nobody to torment him, no bullying Preston here to taunt and sneer and bring impotent wrath to his breast. Here were only his grandfather and the hired men and the housekeeper and her helper. And

all of these were eager to please him, well satisfied if they could bring a smile to his cheek or a glitter of pleasure to his eye.

Of Aleck and John and Henry, the hired men, Jimmy preferred Aleck. Young, short, fat, and red-faced, Aleck was a born comedian. He was surprisingly agile for one so roly-poly, and was forever surprising Jimmy with some antic, such as suddenly dropping on hands and knees and pretending he was a dog trying to pick a fight with Hezekiah. John was a more sombre individual, lacking Aleck's playful imagination but equally eager to be sociable and agreeable, while Henry, the oldest of the three, seldom said anything, but was always glad to have Jimmy around.

And as for Mrs. Sleeper, the housekeeper, her cream-of-tartar biscuits were enough to recommend her to any boy; or her applesauce, with a slight flavoring of lemon; or her whipped-cream pie; or a dozen other culinary marvels. And though both she and Molly, the hired girl, were forever bustling around with their household duties, they were always able to find time to locate the things that Jimmy

had mislaid, or to get a bone for Hezekiah to chew on.

Hezekiah, of course, profited by Sister's being out to pasture. He could now have Jimmy all to himself most of the time. But he had come to regard the colt not as a rival, but as a companion, and he gladly abandoned whatever he might be doing whenever he saw his master starting in the direction of Sister's pasture. It was particularly pleasant to go out and play with Sister because he had no canine companions on the farm this summer. In the past there had usually been two or three collies running around the Burbank farm, but automobiles on the nearby roads had killed two of them, and Jimmy's grandfather, seeing the number of motor cars increasing year by year, had given up keeping dogs.

"Seems as though you just get to know a dog and like him," he explained, "when along comes one of them fool joy-riders and runs over him. I never s'posed the time would come when I wouldn't have a dog around the place, but I swear I wun't keep 'em penned

up, and I can't stand it to have 'em killed, so I give it up."

Still the old man was unfeignedly pleased to have Hezekiah on the farm, and Hezekiah, being less inclined to chase automobiles than the farmer's collies, was never in danger of meeting their fate. These were happy days for him, as well as for Jimmy and Sister.

CHAPTER VIII

STICKS AND STONES

PRESTON GILLIGAN'S father, Luther Gilligan, always was described in the local newspaper as "the well-known sportsman." He preferred to be known as a country gentleman. Official records designated him as a farmer.

As a matter of fact, he did live on a farm, which was just on the outskirts of the village, but he maintained this establishment more for atmosphere than anything else. He realized that his chosen rôle of a country gentleman required a farm, but he had no real interest in farming, and left all the management of the place to his superintendent.

He had inherited a moderate amount of money in his youth, and had increased it by a few shrewd speculations until he was now regarded as one of the richest men in the

county. It pleased him to be known as such, and he lost no opportunity to parade his wealth, either by ostentatious self-indulgence or by equally ostentatious and patronizing charity.

The local newspaper referred to him as a sportsman because his chief interests in life were hunting and horse racing. The only things on his farm to which he gave his personal attention were his dogs and his horses. He raised dogs for hunting—pointers, setters, and foxhounds. He was interested in training them to become expert hunters. If they failed to develop hunting ability satisfactorily, he had no further interest in them: sold them, if he could, for more than they were worth; or, failing that, gave them to somebody in the village with a gesture of great magnanimity.

His interest in horses was of the same sort. He kept a few workhorses on the farm as a matter of course, but his stable was mostly given over to race horses or prospective race horses. And he liked horses—so long as they won races. That was as far as his enthusiasm went. Once they began to lose their speed he

was ready to sell them to the highest bidder. "The old mare" was a household pet unknown to the Gilligan family.

It was Mr. Gilligan's custom every summer to spend considerable time visiting certain farmers and horse breeders in search of good horses to add to his stable. One of the things that he enjoyed most about horse racing was the chance to drive sharp trades in horses. He bought, sold, and swapped; was keenly delighted when he thought that he had engineered a profitable deal, and proportionately chagrined when he came to the conclusion that he had been worsted.

One of the farmers who often had horses that aroused Mr. Gilligan's collecting enthusiasm was old Enoch Burbank, and so it happened in the middle of the summer that he planned a trip to the Burbank farm.

"I hear old Burbank has two or three promising fillies this year," he remarked to his wife at breakfast. "Guess I'll take a run out to his place and look 'em over."

Mrs. Gilligan, her thoughts elsewhere, merely nodded, but Preston showed more in-

terest. "Let me go with you, will you, Pa?" he asked.

Mr. Gilligan, though accustomed to his wife's lack of attention, always was slightly offended by it, for he loved to think that everything he said was of great importance and should be recognized as such by those around him. He was pleased, therefore, at his son's display of interest.

"Why, yes, Press," he said. "Come along, if you want to. I'm glad to see that you're beginning to take an interest in horses."

"Um," Preston mumbled. "D'you suppose we might see that Weak-Kneed Sister of Jimmy Burbank's?"

"Oh, I don't know, I'm sure. But we'll see some horses a great deal more worth seeing than that, or I miss my guess."

The forenoon was well advanced before Preston and his father drove up to the door of the Burbank farm in their roadster. Jimmy's grandfather was helping his men unload some hay. He came out of the barn to greet his guests.

"Hello. Enoch," said Mr. Gilligan, famil-

iarly, as he shook hands. "I hear you have one or two good-looking bits of horseflesh this year."

"This is my boy, Preston," he added.

The farmer nodded gravely at the boy. "I've heard Jimmy speak of ye," he said.

"Now as to hosses," he said, turning to Mr. Gilligan, "I dunno's I've got anything that'd interest ye much, but we might step out to the pasture and you could look over what I've got."

"As a matter of fact," said Mr. Gilligan, "I'm not really looking for any more horses, anyway, but just thought I'd like to drop in and look over your stock."

"Oh, that's all right," said the farmer. He knew that Mr. Gilligan would start talking business soon enough, if he saw anything he wanted.

"I hate to take up your time for nothing, right at haying time and all, but still—"

"Oh, that's all right," said the farmer again. "Jest wait till I tell the boys I'm goin'."

They walked out toward the pasture, the two men discussing horses. Preston strolled

along behind, paying little attention to the talk. Then he ran a few steps and caught up, walking abreast of the men.

"How's that colt of Jimmy's getting along?" he asked.

"Oh, pretty well," said Jimmy's grandfather.

"Is she very lame?"

"I dunno's she is. Jimmy could prob'ly tell ye. Guess he's out here somewhere with her now."

"Oh, is she out in this pasture?"

"Preston," said Mr. Gilligan, "Mr. Burbank and I are out here to look at horses. If you want to see them, come along. If you want to see freaks, wait for a circus."

"I guess she's a freak, all right," said Preston.

He fell behind again, conscious that the remark had displeased Jimmy's grandfather.

They walked around in the pasture, the farmer calling and rattling corn in a wooden bucket. It was more than an hour before they finally found some of the horses, and Preston was getting bored. Then the horses were skit-

tish, and it took the men a long time to get them near enough to examine them carefully. Preston grew restless.

"Guess I'll start along back," he said. Getting no answer, he wandered slowly away.

He strolled along the path idly, kicking at twigs as he walked, and occasionally jumping up to pull down a handful of leaves from a tree just beyond his reach. He had walked about half a mile in this manner, when he suddenly stopped and listened. He proceeded a little farther, and stopped again. He looked down the hill beside him. "Ah," he said softly to himself.

Seated on a stump at the foot of the hill was Jimmy. On the ground beside him Hezekiah lay sleeping in the sun. A little distance away Sister was grazing. Jimmy was holding a wooden grain bucket, such as the one his grandfather had been using to call the horses. Probably he had been feeding Sister some grain. So Preston surmised from what he saw.

As quietly as possible he began to make his way down the hillside. But Sister soon heard him. She stopped grazing, looked up, whin-

nied, and moved back a few steps uncertainly. At her frightened whinny Hezekiah had leaped to his feet, awakened from a sound sleep. He too saw the intruder, and began to bark menacingly. Jimmy turned around to see what all the racket was about. His mouth fell open in surprise, as he saw Preston approaching, but no words came.

"Hello, Helpless," said Preston. "Having a good time with your little dumb friends?"

"How'd you get here?" asked Jimmy at last.

"Oh, I can still walk without crutches," said Preston. "Is that the Weak-Kneed Sister?"

He pointed toward the colt, who had now retreated farther away.

Jimmy nodded. As much as he disliked and distrusted Preston, he could not help being glad he had suddenly appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, for he would see how much the colt had improved.

"Yes, that's her," he said.

"Oh," said Preston. "Can she trot?"

He stooped nonchalantly, and before Jim-

my realized what he was doing he had picked up a stone and hurled it in the direction of Sister. It missed her, but she retreated still farther.

"Here, cut that out," Jimmy yelled, struggling to get to a standing position.

Preston grinned in disdain, and before Jimmy could get to his feet he had picked up another stone and thrown it, again missing his mark. He stooped to pick up still another, but Jimmy, thoroughly angered, lifted one of his stout canes in the air and brought it down with all his strength on Preston's back.

Preston shouted a cry of pain, and straightened up. "You would, would you?" he yelled. "You four-legged fool."

He lunged forward and struck Jimmy one powerful blow. Jimmy, already off his balance as a result of his attack with the cane, toppled over like a tree trunk. Hezekiah, barking, rushed to his defence, but Preston seized the cane which had come down with such force on his own back a moment before, and beat the dog off. Then he quickly seized another stone and hurled it at the colt. It

struck her fairly on the ribs, and she darted off into the woods.

"There goes your precious colt. Let's see you get up and chase her," he shouted at the prostrate Jimmy. Then, as Hezekiah launched a new attack, he scrambled up the hill and disappeared from sight. The dog chased him, braving the blows which fell from Jimmy's captured cane, but gave up the chase when Jimmy whistled, and returned to his master.

With difficulty Jimmy scrambled back to his feet and sat down on the tree stump again. The loss of one of his two canes was a serious matter, but he was giving this little thought now. His mind was on Sister. Would she trust him now? Or would she run from him, fearing that more stones were to be thrown at her?

Tears of baffled helplessness welled up in his eyes. Why must he be so at the mercy of bullies like Preston? Why must he always fall at the first blow? All the happy days of the summer were as nothing in comparison with this one day of unhappiness. Why?

It was time to go back to the farmhouse

for dinner. Mrs. Sleeper would be looking for him. But he couldn't go back without finding Sister again, trying to soothe her.

He rose to his feet, and made his way slowly into the woods, stumbling often because of the lack of his other cane. He called, but no Sister appeared. Taking the wooden bucket out of a knapsack which he wore on his back, he put the few remaining kernels of corn in it and rattled it temptingly. But still there was no sign of Sister.

An hour passed, and he still wandered here and there through the pasture, calling and rattling the corn. Hezekiah trotted stolidly at his heels, wondering when they were going back to dinner. At last Jimmy gave it up, and plodded toward home, gloomy and sick at heart.

Then he saw her. Standing in a clump of trees on the opposite side of a clearing, with ears erect and nostrils dilated, he saw her.

"Here, Sister. Here, girl," he called, and rattled his corn.

It seemed to the boy's eyes as if a shiver passed over the colt's frame. But whether he

imagined the shiver or not, it was certain that no look of trust came into her wild, frightened eyes. She half leaped at his call, and darted like a deer deeper into the woods.

It was too much for his overburdened heart. He sat down on a rock and buried his head in his hands.

"We've lost her, Hezekiah. She's afraid of us now."

The dog rubbed sympathetically against his impotent legs, wondering at the sight of his master in tears, like a girl.

CHAPTER IX

THE COLT GRADUATES

MR. Gilligan and Preston had been gone more than two hours when Jimmy and Hezekiah got back to the farmhouse. The boy had found his cane lying in the path, where Preston had dropped it, and he said nothing about the encounter in the pasture. Yet he had to have some excuse for his tardy return.

"My land, where have you been?" asked Mrs. Sleeper. "Your grandfather nearly had a conniption fit worryin' about ye."

"A snake scared Sister," replied Jimmy. ("And that's what he is, too," he thought to himself.) "I've been trying to get her calmed down, but I couldn't get near her."

"I should think you had," the housekeeper said. "You look as though you'd chased her clean over the mountain and back. Don't you know you hadn't ought to tire yourself all out

that way?" She was trying to scold him, but her relieved voice took all the sting out of her words. "Dinner's all cold, too," she said, hustling to put it on the table for him.

Jimmy found that he was ravenously hungry, despite his low spirits. Indeed, he felt considerably bucked up after he had eaten his fill, and was more optimistic about regaining Sister's confidence.

His optimism was well founded. Sister had become too thoroughly accustomed to the boy to be permanently estranged as the result of one day's mishap. For a few days she shied away when he approached her in the pasture, and then for a few more days she refused to let him fondle her, but gradually he won her back until they were on the old footing again.

And in the meantime Sister was continuing her physical progress. She found herself able to keep pace with the other horses, and even to outstrip the older ones when she set her heart to it. Her legs still felt wobbly after a long canter, and her endurance was not yet equal to that of the other younger horses, but a casual observer would not have noticed any-

thing unusual about her gait or general appearance. Indeed, she was growing into a splendid-looking creature, graceful and well-proportioned. Jimmy had a fresh thrill of pride almost every time he saw her nowadays.

"If I was you," Jimmy's grandfather said to him one day, as the summer neared its end, "I'd be bringin' that colt in and breakin' her to the harness before long."

"You think it would be all right?" asked Jimmy, eagerly. He had been thinking much about this possibility, but had lacked the courage to say anything about it, lest his judgment be ridiculed.

"I should think 'twas about time," his grandfather said. "Prob'ly the boys'll help ye break her."

The very next day, therefore, Aleck accompanied Jimmy to the pasture, carrying a halter rope with him. When they finally found her, Sister, not knowing Aleck, was somewhat skittish about coming up to them, but Jimmy managed to lure her with a bucket of corn, and she offered no protest when he fastened

the halter about her neck. Then he turned her over to Aleck, and they proceeded back to the farmhouse.

She went along, demurely as a kitten, with Aleck leading her and Jimmy offering encouragement from the rear. The enforced slowness of Jimmy's walk caused him to fall behind, but whenever Aleck and the colt got very far ahead they would stop and wait for the boy to overtake them. Sister seemed to sense the fact that Aleck was a friend, and gave him no trouble. When they arrived they put her in a stall in the stable, gave her some oats, and left her.

"I cal'late we might jest as well leave her be to-day," said Aleck. "No use tryin' to do everything all at once."

Jimmy hated to leave her shut up alone, but he bowed to the superior wisdom of his chubby friend. "You don't think we might try her out this afternoon, then?" he ventured, timidly.

"S'pose we could," said Aleck, "but if I was a hoss, I figger I'd like to have a good night's sleep between the time I was fetched

in from the pasture and the time I was broke. We might go ask Henry what he thinks about it. I always thought he had a face like a hoss, so he ought to know."

"I'll take your word for it," said Jimmy, as the subject of the unflattering comparison entered the stable.

"Well, I guess ye might as well, at that," grinned Aleck, "for, come to think of it, Henry ain't got much hoss sense, after all, have ye, Henry?"

"More'n some people I know," grunted Henry. "Did ye bring in the colt?"

"Sure we did," said Jimmy. "She's right there in that stall."

Then Henry, the taciturn, had to look at Sister, admire her, and promise to take part in the ceremony of breaking her into the harness on the morrow. And Jimmy had to tell Henry in words what his eyes had already told him—that Sister had changed and improved beyond all expectation during the summer. And Sister, flicking her tail, seemed to know that high words of praise were being said about her, for she stood with her head

in the air, typifying that unconscious pride which is the foundation of courage, speed, and endurance, lifting the spirited horse above the one whose spirit has been broken.

"I guess she'll do," said Henry.

Jimmy was downstairs for the six-o'clock farm breakfast the next morning ahead of all the other members of the household, eager to get all preliminaries over and get at the business of giving Sister her first trial in the harness. But for all his eagerness, the morning round of farm duties had to proceed before anything else could be considered. He went into the stable and watched Sister eating her breakfast, all unmindful that a turning point in her life had been reached. She ate her oats, and then placidly munched at her hay, while Jimmy watched her and wondered how she would like being introduced to a harness.

Presently Aleck appeared with a currycomb and brush. "S'pose we doll her up a little before puttin' her to work," he suggested.

Jimmy nodded his assent, and Aleck laid aside the currycomb and brush and led Sister

to the watering trough. After she had drunk, he led her to the stable door, and tied her with two ropes to rings at the two sides of the door. Then took up his utensils again, and went about "dolling her up." Sister was inclined to prance around a bit at the unaccustomed treatment, but Aleck appeared undisturbed by her antics.

"So, girl, steady," he said, and kept on smoothing out her glossy coat and carding her thick, tangled mane.

"There," he said at last. "Guess that will fix her up. She's almost as good lookin' as my best gal now."

It did make a difference. Jimmy's pride knew no bounds. He thought Sister, at that moment, was the finest-looking horse in the world. Her chestnut coat, sleek and smooth, shone in the sun, and her luxuriously thick mane, groomed to perfection, hung jauntily over her fine neck.

"Isn't she a dandy?" he murmured.

"I'll tell ye in a little while whether she is or not," said Aleck. "I guess we're about ready for business."

Jimmy was all excited, and he stood patting Sister's neck almost mechanically as Aleck went in search of Henry and John to help with the breaking of Sister. Aleck soon returned with his colleagues, and with them came Jimmy's grandfather. Hezekiah came, too, sensing excitement, and soon even Mrs. Sleeper and Molly deserted the kitchen to participate in the great occasion.

"You ought to charge admission, Jimmy," said Aleck. "I bet the Governor and all his high mucky-mucks will be right along for grandstand seats."

As he talked, he took down a harness from a peg in the wall, and handed the bridle and breastplate to Henry. The latter took his place on one side of Sister, while Aleck stood on the opposite side, and John and Jimmy at her head. The others stood a little distance away, watching. Sister merely side-stepped a little as Aleck threw the saddle over her, but when he began to tighten the girth she jerked her head and tried to pull away from him.

"So, girl, steady," he said, and kept right

on buckling the harness. Jimmy talked to her, too, and though she grew increasingly restless as the various parts of the harness were attached, her protests were unavailing. Almost before she knew what was happening the bit was slipped between her teeth, and there she stood fully harnessed, ready to be hitched into a wagon.

They led her outside, then, and brought up a light but sturdy wagon, which was attached quickly to the harness. Sister was getting nervous and excited. She shivered a little, and moved her feet about, but Jimmy and John still stood at her head, keeping her quiet, and Jimmy's voice reassured her somewhat, even though she could not understand the meaning of the metal between her teeth and the leather around her body.

Now Hezekiah, infected by Sister's excitement, grew excited himself, and set up a furious barking. This, in turn, added to Sister's bewilderment, and she began tossing her head and shifting her feet more rapidly than before.

"There, sir," said Aleck. "Ye might know

things were goin' too good to last. See if ye can't get the dog quiet, Jimmy, and let John hold the horse."

Jimmy did not notice that Aleck nodded significantly to the others as he spoke, nor that his grandfather and the women moved farther away as he limped over to the dog. But as he reached the dog, now quiet again, and started to pat his head, he heard Aleck say, "Now, then, let 'er go."

He turned, and Aleck was in the wagon, the reins in his hand. Sister was moving, first forward, then backward, pushing and pulling the wagon in turn. Then she started a rush toward the stable, but she found that the metal thing between her teeth was pulling at the corners of her mouth. She stopped still, and the metal thing fell lose again, as Aleck loosened the reins. The metal thing then pulled at one corner of her mouth, and she started whirling around in that direction to try to get relief. The wagon behind her tipped up on two wheels, but Aleck, by judicious maneuvering, guided her into the road,

and she started trotting as straight as any one could wish.

Jimmy and the others saw her trotting down the road, pulling the wagon and Aleck after her, until they passed from sight. Then, a little later, they saw her come trotting back, slow down as Aleck pulled at the reins, and walk into the stable as calmly as if she had done it every day of her life.

There was a rush for the stable. Jimmy forgot all about keeping Hezekiah quiet, and followed the others as fast as his crippled legs would let him.

Aleck had jumped from the wagon and was patting Sister's neck. Calm as her entry had been, she was nervous again, now that the ordeal was over, and was quaking slightly. She whinnied as Jimmy came up to her head.

The whinny touched him, and made him feel sorry for Sister. He knew that it was as necessary for her to be broken as it was for a baby to learn to walk, but he felt sorry for her all the same.

"Yes, she is a dandy," said Aleck, as if

Jimmy's question had been put to him only that moment. "Sure as preachin'."

"Let's get her unharnessed now," said Jimmy. "She's earned a rest."

She was accordingly given the rest that she had earned, but the next day she was harnessed again, and Jimmy himself drove her, though Aleck went with him. And on the days that followed Sister grew accustomed to the harness, and it was no longer necessary even for Aleck to accompany him on his drives, for Jimmy was a good horseman and could have managed her by himself even on that first day if there had not been the danger of being thrown out of the wagon and thereby rendered dependent on his own undependable limbs.

The exercise in the harness, coupled with the good care that she received in the stable, seemed to be just the finishing touches that Sister needed to her summer's outing, and now her endurance increased and her legs became firmer and sounder than ever. Jimmy gradually increased the length of his drives with her, and never once did she weaken.

But finally the day came when Jimmy had to return to the village to prepare for the fall term of school. And he took great pride in writing to his father, the doctor, that there was no need to come after him, as he could borrow one of his grandfather's wagons and drive home with Sister.

And so he took his leave of Aleck and John and Henry, of Mrs. Sleeper and Molly, and then of his grandfather. Hezekiah jumped up into the wagon beside him, and at a cluck from Jimmy they were off.

Never had he felt so completely satisfied with the world as he did on that day as he drove through the wooded roads that led from his grandfather's farm to the village. Only a few months before he had ridden through these same roads, leading a weak and unpromising colt. Now he was returning, and that colt was the fine, fast-stepping mare behind whom he rode. The wonder of it filled him, so that before he realized it he was entering the village streets.

And then came the final and greatest triumph of the day. For as he turned into

Main Street, who should be standing on the sidewalk but Preston Gilligan? Preston Gilligan, who had thrown stones at the colt that he thought would never amount to anything.

Jimmy, holding the reins lightly in one hand as Sister trotted smartly down the street, waved the other hand companionably at his former tormentor.

"Hi, Press," he shouted.

Preston merely stared, too astonished even to sneer.

CHAPTER X

A CHALLENGE

ONE short year Sister had lived, and in it she had been transformed. Utterly helpless she had been at first; such a weakling that she had been pronounced unfit to live. But they had let her live, because a boy had pleaded for her life. And the boy had cared for her, nursed her, and she had begun to get strong. And then, because of what the boy did for her and because of her own inherent spirit, she had not only overcome her utter helplessness, but she had developed into a normal creature; she had lived by her own efforts in the open pasture, and thrived on it. Now here she was, a splendid yearling, worthy, after all, to take her rightful place in the stable where, for so many years, the old mare who brought her into the world had been the recognized queen.

These were proud days for Jimmy—proud and happy days. It was as if he had built this glorious creature with his own hands. Not that he failed to give due credit to those who had helped him in his task of transforming the weak-kneed colt—Josh Thibber, his father and mother, his grandfather, the veterinary, the farm hands. He recognized the debt, and was grateful, but when one creates a masterpiece, is one not entitled to aid and advice? His had been the responsibility. Sister owed her life to him. She belonged to him. And he was justly proud of his possession and of what he had done.

It was good to drive down the street behind this high-stepping yearling colt and feel that he owned her, that he was responsible for her very existence. And if he took pleasure in the knowledge that men and boys along the street were looking at her in wonder and admiration, and marveling among themselves at the miracle he had performed, who shall say that he was not entitled to his little thrill of self-satisfaction? Of course the whole town knew the story of Sister. It was a story worth

telling and retelling. The local newspaper published it:

"James Burbank, Jr., better known as 'Jimmy,' son of Dr. James Burbank, has a yearling colt which he has raised under unusual circumstances. The colt was unable to stand on her own legs for some time after she was born, but Jimmy's constant care has done its work. She was recently broken to the harness, and we now see Jimmy driving about town with as lively a piece of horseflesh as anybody could ask for."

Dr. Wragg, the cynical old veterinary, went about from place to place telling how he had recommended that the colt be shot, and how Jimmy had interceded and brought her up. He took a savage delight in making himself out a heartless, unimaginative, mistaken man, because he thought Jimmy would appear so much the more heroic and glorious by comparison.

Thus the whole town sang Jimmy's praises, and it was natural that he should be proud. But there was more than pride in his heart these days—something deeper and more substantial. He could not analyze his feelings exactly, but somehow the complete transforma-

tion of Sister had lightened the load of his own physical defects. No amount of care and no amount of will power would give him back the free use of his own legs, but, cripple though he was, he had accomplished for this horse the thing that neither he nor any one else could ever accomplish for him. Life was well worth living if one could do such things as that.

He felt that Sister was akin to him. "Weak-Kneed Sister" no more, except in name—but the name would remain. It was he, indeed, who was the weak-kneed member of the partnership now. But she owed her strength to him, and he, in turn, lived in her. Before ever Sister came into the world he had enjoyed driving a good horse, because he had the faculty of imagining, as he drove, that he himself was trotting in the footsteps of the horse. It was, perhaps, a far-fetched delusion, or might be so regarded by one who had never been obliged to substitute imagination for action. But it was a valuable trick of the mind for Jimmy. It kept him from despondency, buoyed him up, renewed his love of life. And now he had a horse whose life actually was

blended with his own. He need not depend entirely on his imagination any more. He could reason the thing out. He could tell himself that it really was he, in a way, that was trotting along the road with such vigor. For what was Sister but a part of himself? Was it not a spark from his own life which worked in her? So he reasoned.

And there was yet another factor contributing to Jimmy's good spirits. By coming into the full possession of her powers, Sister had stolen away from Preston one of his favorite taunts—that Sister and Jimmy were alike in being good-for-nothings. The tormentor, indeed, had been astonished into a temporary silence, and hardly spoke to Jimmy at all—a state of affairs which was eminently satisfactory to Jimmy. Healthy, active boys usually fail to realize the intense bitterness their words may cause to those less fortunate than themselves, and Preston, though he realized that he was causing pain when he jibed at Jimmy,—and did it for that purpose,—did not understand the extent of Jimmy's mental suffering. He had no conception of the humili-

ation of physical imperfection; could not understand the depth of Jimmy's woe at being unable to run and jump and play games with the other boys. Thus he could not know that he was prodding a throbbing wound when he sneered at Jimmy's helplessness.

But now Jimmy had become something of a hero, and Preston was too vexed at his own consequent loss of prestige to think of new jibes. He had been so sure that Sister never would gain the full use of her legs that he took it as a personal affront when Jimmy drove her down the street, demonstrating the fact that he had been mistaken. He felt that he had to do something to reëstablish his own supremacy, but he knew that mere words would not do it. The other boys of his age, who had been in the habit of deferring to him as a matter of course, had taken courage in Jimmy's triumph, and when he spoke slightingly of the cripple, they came stoutly to his defense. Once, when from sheer desperation he had jeered at Jimmy, Bob Buckley, the undertaker's son, had bluntly told him to "shut up," and though he knew he could put

down this show of mutiny by fighting Bob, he realized that he would only be making matters worse, for Skinny Burger and Ned Long would surely rally to Bob's defense and then he would have a real mutiny on his hands. So he held his tongue and thought hard.

Gradually an idea evolved itself in his mind. He began at once to work toward its accomplishment.

"Pa," he said one Saturday morning to his father, speaking very casually, "can I take Sheba out to-day for a little ride?"

Now Sheba was Mr. Gilligan's favorite driving horse. She had never been quite fast enough for a race horse, but for all that she stepped along considerably faster than the average driving horse, and she was a splendid-looking creature. Mr. Gilligan liked her because he thought she looked like the kind of horse a prosperous country gentleman should drive. He frequently had her harnessed into a light buggy and drove into town with her, instead of using a motor car, because it seemed more in keeping with his chosen rôle. And

he was pleased now that Preston seemed to share his taste.

"Sure, Press," he said. "Take her, if you like. Where you going?"

"Oh, nowhere in particular," replied the boy. "Just thought I'd like to take a little ride, that's all."

"That's fine," said his father. "You ought to begin to take more interest in horses. You can have a lot of fun with 'em."

"Yeah," said Preston.

"By the way," continued Mr. Gilligan, "have you seen this yearling your friend Jimmy brought up?"

"Sure, I've seen her," said the boy.

"Is she as good as they say she is?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Preston. "I don't think she's so much."

"You wouldn't advise me to swap Sheba for her, then?" asked his father, grinning at his own pleasantry.

"Huh, I should say not," said Preston, and his voice implied a very small regard for the much-touted yearling. "Sheba's worth three of her."

"All right," said his father. "You can take her then."

Preston went to the stable and hitched Sheba up to his father's light buggy. Then he drove into the village. It was Saturday morning, and he was confident that Jimmy would be taking Sister out for a drive. He stopped his own horse a little way up the street and sat in the buggy, waiting.

His calculations were good, and he had not been waiting long when Jimmy drove out of the stable with Sister and turned up the street in his direction. Preston turned Sheba around as Jimmy approached, and drove abreast of him. Jimmy saw that something was afoot, but drove on.

"Hello," he said, coldly.

"Can I come, too?" asked Preston, mock-politely.

"If you want to," said Jimmy.

"I don't know as I can keep up with that wonderful horse of yours," Preston continued, trying to sound intensely sarcastic.

"Maybe not," Jimmy replied.

"You see this poor old plug of mine didn't

have such a nice nurse when she was a colt," said Preston.

Jimmy made no answer, and Preston dropped the sarcasm. "See here," he said. "You think you're so smart, I'll bet you don't dare to race me around the lake."

"Why should I?" Jimmy countered.

So that was Preston's game, was it? A race around the lake. He considered the challenge quickly in his mind, and knew that he could not accept it. The Gilligan mare was a fast, seasoned horse, and Sister was only a yearling colt, much too young for any such effort even if she had not been handicapped by a bad start in life. He knew that Preston would say that he was afraid to race, and that this was just what Preston wanted. But the thing was absurd. Let Preston say what he pleased.

Preston's next remark fulfilled Jimmy's expectations. "You don't dare to," he said.

"I'm not going to, anyway," said Jimmy.

They had been walking their horses, side by side, as they talked, and now they were approaching the postoffice. The morning mail

had just come in, and there was a crowd outside the office, waiting for the mail to be distributed. Preston now quickened his mare into a trot, and rode up in front of the office, where he stopped.

He singled Ned Long out of the crowd, and shouted at him so that every one could hear. "Hey, Ned, I just offered to show Jimmy what a real horse could do to his side-show freak. I challenged him to a race around the lake, but he's afraid to do it. What do you think of his great Weak-Kneed Sister now?"

Jimmy heard, as did all those in the crowd. He knew that most of the men would understand his reasons for refusing to accept Preston's challenge, but he felt it incumbent upon him to exonerate Sister. He drove up and stopped beside Preston.

"Listen," he said. "You know that Sister is only a colt, and that she couldn't stand a race around the lake. But I'll tell you what I'll do. A year from to-day I'll race you around the lake, and the loser will set up the ice-cream sodas for everybody in our class. Write that down on your cuff, if you think

I'm afraid of your old nag." Jimmy's ire was aroused.

"Yeah, he'll race me in a year," sneered Preston. "That'll give him time to screw up his courage. Never do to-day what you can put off until to-morrow, particularly if you're afraid."

"One year from to-day," Jimmy repeated. "Get up, Sister."

CHAPTER XI

THE CHALLENGE ACCEPTED

TO a boy looking ahead, a year is a long, long time. Yet Jimmy knew it was the shortest possible time in which he could hope that Sister would reach sufficient maturity to be matched against a horse of Sheba's strength and training. And he was not at all sure that even as a two-year-old she would be equal to the task. Yet, in the face of Preston's challenge, he could not bring himself to ask for more than a year's grace.

Sometimes, as he looked forward to the day, it seemed but a short distance in the future, and he was impatient at the slow course of nature in building up a colt. But at other times the months loomed large before him, and he was confident that the steadily-maturing Sister would be sound and strong long before the day set for her début.

Despite the multitudinous affairs which occupy a boy's mind in the course of a year, the projected race was never long from his thoughts. If he had been inclined to forget it, Preston would soon have cured him of his forgetfulness, for this piece of strategy had given Preston back the use of his tongue with a vengeance, and he lost no opportunity to jeer at Jimmy for not taking up the challenge when it was flung, and to boast that he would beat Jimmy's mare just as badly in a year as he would have done on that day. He considered that he had won a temporary victory, and it rehabilitated himself in his own esteem. Once more he was the confident, swaggering Preston of old.

Jimmy went about his daily round of pleasures and duties as before, trying to harden himself to Preston's taunts, but often finding himself either angry or hurt, despite his resolution to disregard all Preston said. Usually, however, both anger and pain eventually resolved themselves into determination to turn the tables on Preston when the fateful day

came, and he devoted himself to the task of developing Sister.

He consulted all the authorities available as to how much he should exercise her, what he should feed her, and how he should care for her. His father, Josh, and Dr. Wragg all came in for questioning, and he did his best to follow all the instructions given him. And Sister continued to thrive. Her lank, coltish body continued to fill out and her sinews continued to harden.

When the winter set in, and Bryants county had its usual heavy fall of snow, Jimmy exercised her in a sleigh instead of a buggy, but otherwise things went on as before. And after the winter months had ticked slowly by, he took her again to his grandfather's farm, and turned her out to pasture. Toward the end of the summer he brought her back to his grandfather's stable, and began for the first time to test her speed on the road. There was a straight stretch of road not far from the farm, which in former days had been used by the farmers of the neighborhood as a race track, and here Jimmy repaired often, urging

Sister on at top speed for a quarter of a mile or more.

The game appealed to the two-year-old. How much she had been testing her own speed in the pasture during the summer, nobody knew, but speed was in her system, and she needed little encouragement to stretch out her long limbs and trot down the makeshift race track with all her might. Indeed, Jimmy soon found that it required all the strength in his arms to pull her down to a walk again, when he neared the end of the stretch.

Aleck, the hired man, grew interested in Jimmy's efforts to train the horse, and rigged up a makeshift racing sulky from an old light pung. He detached the front wheels from the rest of the body, and built a seat which was not too precarious for the crippled Jimmy to ride in. And Sister, finding her load lighter, trotted even faster than before.

When Jimmy went home in the fall, he took the rude sulky with him, wondering if it would be unfair to use it in the forthcoming race with Preston. The latter settled the question for him the first time he saw the outfit.

"Say," he said, "if you think you're going to be smart and use that funny-looking contraption, I'll go you one better and use a real road sulky."

"All right, go ahead," said Jimmy, and that matter was settled.

The year had all but passed now, and the day set for the race was drawing near. Nearly every one in the village seemed to have heard of it, and it was assuming the proportions of an important local event. Mr. Gilligan admired his son immensely for instigating the race, and told all he met that Preston was "a chip off the old block." Privately he made a few bets on the outcome of the race, believing that Sister was entirely too immature for the competition. Dr. Burbank, on the other hand, was inclined to be displeased, but when Jimmy explained the circumstances he agreed not to interfere, warning the boy, however, that it would be better to lose the race than to injure his horse.

The day came, and it was agreed that the race should start and finish in front of the post-office, where Preston had announced the chal-

lenge a year ago. Ned Long was chosen as starter and judge. He was waiting at the edge of the sidewalk when the two boys drove up, and behind him was a big crowd of townspeople. Another crowd stood on the opposite side of the street, while every nearby window was pressed into service by those who preferred to watch from within.

Preston grinned confidently as he drove up to confer with Ned Long. Jimmy stared straight ahead, his whole attention absorbed in the man-sized task of keeping the nervous Sister steady.

The distance around the lake was about two miles. It was a valley road, with scattered farmhouses along the way. It was not a main highway, and was little traveled, therefore, except by the farmers who lived on it.

Ned Long, proud of his position as the official of the race, conferred quickly with Preston as to the method of starting it. As they talked, one of the men in the crowd pushed forward.

"You ought not to race in the street here, boys," he said. "You might get into trouble.

Why don't you start up at the turn of the road?"

But Preston was not to be cheated out of his carefully-planned opportunity to show off before a crowd. "Aw, we'll be all right," he said. "All ready, Ned."

"I'll say, 'one, two, three, go,'" Ned explained, and Jimmy and Preston nodded, holding their reins in readiness. Preston threw a final glance of satisfaction over the expectant crowd. Jimmy, hardly aware of the crowd, stolidly awaited the word to start. He wanted Sister to win, but he was by no means sure that she was capable of it. But win or lose, he knew that she would give him her best efforts. He was ready.

Ned was giving them the word: "One—two-oo—three-ee—GO!"

Sister had been getting more and more nervous as Jimmy had held her still there before the crowd, and now she shot unsteadily forward as he released the strain on her bit and clucked to her. Sheba started more evenly, being used to admiring throngs, and her steady

start gave her the advantage. Preston pulled into the lead.

At the turn of the road, a quarter of a mile on, the Gilligan team was two or three lengths ahead, and Preston, urging his mare on, took a moment to turn around and look at Jimmy. The grin on his face seemed to say that the race was already won.

"Good-by, now," he yelled. "Guess I'll be going along."

Jimmy made no reply. He clucked now and then to Sister, and occasionally spoke an encouraging word, but for the most part he was letting her have her own way, knowing that she liked nothing better than to be given her head and allowed to test her own speed.

And now, as if Preston's boastful shout had tempted Fate, Sister began to close up the distance between the two teams. Preston, becoming aware of the hot pursuit, held Sheba in the very center of the narrow road to prevent being passed. At the same time he urged his steed on, slapping her with his reins and shouting imprecations at her.

Sister could have passed if there had been room, but Jimmy tried first one side and then the other and found the space too narrow.

"Get out of the way," he yelled, growing angry, but Preston paid no heed. Thus they raced on for a mile.

Jimmy, seeing the uselessness of trying to pass, had stifled his anger and was biding his time. He knew a place, a little farther on, where he thought he could get by. In the meantime he knew that his horse had the ability to win, and he was confident of the outcome.

His chance came sooner than he expected. A farmer in a cart loomed ahead of them in the road, and Preston had to pull Sheba over to the left-hand side of the road to pass him. Jimmy was close behind. Then, as he cleared the cart, Preston yanked at the rein and veered his horse back into the middle of the road. But in his eagerness to forestall any attempt by Jimmy to pass, he yanked so hard that Sheba went all the way over to the other side, and Jimmy, seeing his chance, spurted straight

ahead with Sister and passed his rival before he could pull Sheba back far enough to block the way.

From then on the result of the race was never in doubt. Sister, keyed up to a tremendous pitch of excitement, left the more urbane Gilligan mare farther and farther behind. Preston shouted and slapped; cajoled and whipped. But the distance between them steadily lengthened.

Sister fairly flew around a corner, and was lost to Preston's sight. As the pursuer turned the corner he saw his rival again, but another corner soon cut off his view. He saw neither Sister nor Jimmy again that day. The race was lost, and he had not the courage to face the expectant crowd that he knew would be waiting in front of the postoffice. He turned into a side road, and made his way home by a circuitous route.

Jimmy, unaware of Preston's abject surrender, turned into the main street and heard a cheer go up from the crowd in front of the postoffice. He didn't stop, however, but

merely pulled Sister down to a slower gait and drove on home. The white foam of perspiration was spattering under her harness, and he wanted to get her rubbed down and blanketed. He knew that she had won the race. That was enough.

He found Josh Thibber waiting for him when he reached the stable.

"Who won?" Josh asked, as Jimmy drove in. He tried to make the question sound unimportant, but Jimmy was not deceived.

"Sister did," he answered, happily.

"Did ye?" asked Josh, eagerly. "I thought ye would." Then, feeling that he was neglecting his duty, he added. "I dunno's you'd ought to have done it, though. Ye might have got hurt."

He helped Jimmy down from his seat, and began undoing the harness. "By golly," he said, "I'd like to have seen that race."

Jimmy grinned.

Up in front of the postoffice the crowd wondered why Preston did not come in. Finally an automobile was pressed into service to go

around the route of the race and make sure that no accident had happened. When those in the automobile party returned and reported that they had seen no sign of a mishap and no sign of Preston, the crowd snickered with amusement and dispersed.

CHAPTER XII

A BLOW BELOW THE BELT

JIMMY'S pride in Sister knew no bounds, but he was a little worried about the possible effect of the race on her. It was a severe test of her strength, and he knew that he would never forgive himself if developments showed that he had put her to the test before she was able to undergo it. If she should go lame now, all because he had allowed Preston to inveigle him into a race, he would have none but himself to blame.

But Sister did not go lame. Indeed, the trying two miles seemed to have instilled new life and spirit into her. That will to achieve superiority, which she had felt in the pasture, was redoubled by this taste of victory. Trotting along the road now, she looked and listened for a rival, hoping to have another opportunity to race and win. At sight of an-

other team ahead, be it the meanest farm plug, she would spurt rapidly forward, so that it was all Jimmy could do to hold her to a steady trot; nor would she soften her gait until the other team had been left safely behind.

Thus Jimmy's fears for the rashness of his deed passed, and he gave himself up to glorying in the mighty steed which he had fostered.

And he was more than ever a hero in the village. Everybody talked of the race, and when it became known that Preston had been so badly beaten that he had turned back home, rather than drive in to the finish, great tales began to be told about Weak-Kneed Sister. And as the tales passed from mouth to mouth, they grew in magnitude and wonder, until one would have thought that this mare of Jimmy's must be something beyond all imagination. And one would have thought, to hear some of these tales, that Jimmy himself was only a slightly less miraculous figure than his horse. Preston had made a big mistake in not finishing the race. He had left much room for imagination to work.

Preston had been furious that day. He had

driven home, put up his horse, and retired to his room to avoid questioning by his father. When he finally had to face his father, he said that Jimmy had won by luck—that a farmer with a cart had got in his way, and held him up so long that Jimmy had gained a lead. His father, angry at having his predictions upset, was unsympathetic, and this increased Preston's anger at Jimmy.

He avoided the village until Monday morning, when he had to go back to school. Then he had to face the music. The boys who had heard his boasts for a year grinned openly when they met him, and some of them made jocular remarks. And he knew that he might try to explain, or he might growl, or he might grow belligerent, and none of these things would have any effect on the prevailing scorn for him.

He blamed it all on Jimmy. The crippled boy became to his impassioned mind an evil genius, bent on discrediting him. It never occurred to him that he was his own evil genius, and had brought all his troubles on himself. He blamed Jimmy—Jimmy and his despicable

horse. And he vowed to himself that he would get even.

Having taken this resolution, he began to consider how he could best accomplish his purpose. But the days passed, and no plan presented itself to his brain. Yet his anger was undimmed.

He saw Jimmy every day at school, but hardly spoke to him. Jeers and jibes were no good to him now, even if he thought he could use them without drawing down the wrath of the other boys. He wanted something more substantial than words. The anger surged afresh within him whenever he saw Jimmy.

He wondered what people would say if he should actually beat Jimmy with his fists, but even as he entertained the thought he knew that it would only result in ostracism for himself.

When he saw Jimmy driving Sister he became doubly angry. He was riding with his father in the roadster one day when they met the team on the road. Josh Thibber was riding with Jimmy, and Sister was stepping along at a lively trot. As the automobile car-

rying Mr. Gilligan and Preston drew near, Sister shied to one side of the road and pranced excitedly. It was all Jimmy could do to hold her.

"Fool horse is still afraid of automobiles," Preston remarked scornfully to his father.

"She's a nervous baby all right," the elder Gilligan replied. "But you want to remember it's the nervous horses that make the steppers. She's a sweet-looking little thing. I almost wish I owned her myself."

"I guess you wouldn't keep her long," said Preston. And the subject lapsed.

But Preston did not forget the incident. He had it in mind one day when he drove to school with the roadster. And he had it in mind that night when he came out of school and climbed into the roadster again. He sat behind the wheel and watched Jimmy limp down the path and up the sidewalk toward home. The dog Hezekiah met him and followed.

Jimmy saw him sitting there, a sullen, supercilious look on his face, but he paid no attention. He was going home to harness Sister for her daily exercise. It was not so much

of a cross for him nowadays that his crippled legs held down his homeward progress, because he knew that Sister would be waiting for him, eager for their daily drive together. It was not as in the other days, when she was a helpless colt and he had hopes and fears all jumbled up together as he went to her.

Hezekiah, faithful as ever, trotted ahead of him, waited for him to make up the distance between them, and then trotted on again. The dog was grateful whenever his young master addressed a companionable word or two to him; more grateful when they arrived at the stable, and Sister was harnessed, and Jimmy whistled to him to jump up in the wagon beside him —as he did this day.

"Well, Hezekiah," said Jimmy, as they drove out of the stable, "how would you like to take a little ride up over Garshin's Hill to-day?"

Hezekiah, intent on watching the road slide backward under them, failed to acknowledge the question, and Jimmy took his silence as consent. He settled back in his seat and gave

Sister her head. She was stepping smartly along.

Reaching the corner of the Garshin's Hill road, Jimmy became aware of an automobile behind him. He turned and saw that it was Preston.

"Get out of the way," Preston yelled, and blew his horn long and loud.

Sister jumped at the sound, but Jimmy turned her into the Garshin's Hill road, and Preston continued along the main highway. Hezekiah, who had jumped from the wagon as Sister started to prance, barked at the disappearing car, and then followed the wagon, panting at the pace set by Sister.

"Steady, girl, steady," said Jimmy to the frightened horse. "You'll have to get used to automobiles."

They began the ascent of the hill, and Sister, the automobile forgotten, settled down to her climb. Hezekiah took advantage of her slower gait to regain his breath and do a little exploring along the roadside.

It was a long, hard climb, and at the top of the hill Jimmy stopped the horse for a rest,

before descending on the other side. He had chosen the hill for the day's drive not so much for the exercise Sister would get climbing it, but for the experience she would get in descending it. He expected that he might have a little trouble keeping her at a walk on the way down, with the wagon pushing her from behind, but this was a thing she must learn.

She started down calmly enough, holding the wagon back and refraining from breaking into a trot. But when they were about halfway down Jimmy saw something which alarmed him. An automobile had appeared in sight at the foot of the hill, and was beginning the ascent—and Sister had not yet overcome her coltish fear of automobiles. Would she get frightened, lose control of herself, and dash down the hill? Jimmy took a firm grasp on the reins, and prepared to do all he could to keep her from bolting.

The car came nearer, and Jimmy, lifting his eyes a moment from the horse, uttered a gasp. It was Preston. He had evidently skirted the hill by a roundabout road, and would meet them on the hill.

"What's he up to? Jimmy muttered to himself. His fingers tightened on the reins. "Steady, Sister," he cautioned.

But Sister had seen the car coming, and was beginning to fidget. She could not overcome the idea that these chugging vehicles might do her harm.

"Steady, Sister. Steady now."

Preston was little more than a hundred yards away now, and Sister began to toss her head in the air and side-step.

"Steady," Jimmy repeated.

Then, suddenly, Preston's horn emitted a shrill, extended shriek, and his car swerved away from the right-hand side of the road. It was in second gear, and thus making more noise than ordinarily, and now it was shooting straight at Sister's head.

The horse, beside herself with unreasoning fear, snorted and reared.

"Steady," Jimmy shouted, but Sister was all unheeding, either to his shouts or to the pressure that he was exerting with all his strength on her bit. All she could realize was that this shrieking, chugging, metal monster

was rushing at her. She leaped to this side and that; surged forward and reared again.

Preston came on until he was only about ten yards from the horse, and then he swerved to the right, cleared the team, and drove on up the hill.

But Sister was in a frenzy now, and nothing Jimmy could do would avail to calm her. As the automobile swung by, she broke into a wild gallop down the hill. And the faster she went, the harder the wagon pushed from behind, goading her on still faster. Jimmy tugged at the reins, but with a swift jerk of her head she yanked them completely out of his hands, and as the pressure on her bit was released she realized that she was utterly unguided—and galloped madly on. Hezekiah joined in the chase, lifting his voice in excited barks, and this added still more to the wild, chaotic fear that was dominating Sister.

Jimmy, of course, was frightened. But he realized that he was helpless. The reins were gone, and therefore he could not hope to stop the horse until she had either tired herself out or collided with something. If he had been

able to use his legs, he might have jumped, but he realized the foolhardiness of this under the circumstances. All he could do was to grip the seat and await the outcome.

They reached the foot of the hill in a space of seconds, but Sister kept up her wild gallop. The wagon swayed from one side of the road to the other; Hezekiah ran and barked; Jimmy hung on. An excited farmer ran out of his house just in time to see them dashing out of sight around a corner.

But that corner was the end of the runaway. Sister made a sharp turn, unmindful of the wagon behind her, and as the wagon skidded, one of the rear wheels struck a tree. It snapped like a broken twig, and before Jimmy realized what had happened, the axle was dragging on the ground. It gave Jimmy a terrific jolt, but the dragging axle acted as an effective brake, and Sister slowed down and finally stopped.

She was shivering with excitement, and Jimmy, uncertain how long she would remain still, got out of the wagon as quickly as he could and limped up in front of her. He was

patting her and talking softly to her when the farmer, who had heard the crash, came running around the corner.

"You all right?" he demanded, breathlessly.

"Sure," said Jimmy.

"Pretty close shave," the farmer commented.

"She got a little frightened on the hill," Jimmy explained.

"Say," said the farmer, "ain't you Dr. Burbank's boy?"

Jimmy nodded.

The farmer took a new interest. "That must be the hoss they was tellin' me about, then," he exclaimed. "You better bring her into my barn and telephone your father."

Just then Preston drove around the corner again, and stopped far enough away to avoid frightening Sister again. He jumped out of his car and ran toward Jimmy and the farmer.

"I noticed your horse seemed a little frightened, and I thought I'd better come back and see if you were all right," he said to Jimmy. Yet he did not appear at all sorry.

"You needn't have bothered," said Jimmy.

"Nothing I can do?" asked Preston.

"Nothing."

"Well, I'll be going along, then."

"Do," said Jimmy.

"Friend of yours?" asked the farmer, as Preston drove away.

"Well," said Jimmy, "I don't know as I would call him that."

He knew well enough that Preston's strange actions on the hill had not been accidental.

CHAPTER XIII

FAST STEPPING

A LITTLE accident now and then, such as losing a wheel from a buggy, means little in a boy's life, so long as it leaves no serious consequences. Thus Preston's carefully planned revenge fell flat. The wheel was soon replaced by a new one, and neither Jimmy nor Sister was any the worse for the accident. In a few days it was forgotten.

Life went on as before. Jimmy's mind and his time were fully occupied now. His physical disability continued to sit lightly on him, for he had found something to engage his interest.

As winter came on, and the roads around the countryside began to fill up with snow, making it impossible for automobiles to penetrate all the places where a country doctor must go, Dr. Burbank fell back more and

more on horses. The shrieking of automobile horns gave way to the pleasant jingle of sleigh bells. And Jimmy decided to volunteer Sister for the cause of mercy.

Now, therefore, Sister entered upon a new way of life. Dr. Burbank still used old Nettie for his daily rounds in the village, and he had another mare, Betsy, whom he used for longer trips. But there were many days—and nights—when the long trips piled upon one another, and new strength was needed. It was no uncommon thing for the doctor to be awakened from his sleep after a long day's work, and summoned to a distant bedside; and then he had to recruit his own strength as best he might, but he could not ask a tired horse to haul him through the night if there was any way of avoiding it.

Sister became the relief force. She became accustomed to being aroused at any hour for journeys of from one mile to fifteen. And there were times when she, as well as the doctor, had to stifle the weariness of long labor, when the calls for relief from suffering multi-

plied so fast that there was insufficient time for rest.

But she was still Jimmy's horse. He loaned her into his father's service for as long as she was needed, but he remained her master, her groom, and her friend. It pleased him that this creature of his should have become an important factor in the welfare of the community, as it pleased her to be called upon to speed over the soft snow to the accompaniment of jangling sleigh bells. Whenever possible, after school or on Saturdays, Jimmy drove her for the doctor, and felt anew the thrill of ownership and the mysterious feeling of being a part of this sensitive, robust life which he had saved. On other days, when the press of the doctor's duties lightened, and Sister was temporarily released from his service, Jimmy would take Hezekiah out for a drive, as of old. But these days were few.

The season of horses and sleighs was short. Automobiles had become too much a part of everyday life to be crowded out for long, even by the heavy snows of Bryants county. Men didn't give up using their cars until it was an

absolute impossibility to get through the drifted roads, and they took them out again as soon as there seemed a chance of using them.

And when the season ended, and Dr. Burbank was once more making his trips by automobile, Jimmy had Sister all to himself again, all the better for the taste of hard work she had been given.

The snow disappeared, and the mud set in. And once more Dr. Burbank had to call on Sister for occasional trips, because washouts in the gravel roads prevented the passage of automobiles. But this was a brief relapse, and as the spring advanced, filling the young mare with a new eagerness for speed and activity, it devolved on Jimmy to give her the exercise that she needed and craved.

Josh Thibber had taken a renewed interest in Sister ever since the race with Sheba. He rode with Jimmy often, and gave him many little hints as to her care. And sometimes Jimmy would encounter him in the stable, studying the mare with a speculative eye.

"I'd like to know just how fast that mare

o' yours can trot," he confided to Jimmy at one of these times.

It was a new suggestion to Jimmy, but it aroused his own curiosity. "I wonder," he said.

"What would ye say to takin' her over to the fairgrounds and timin' her for the mile?" Josh proposed.

"That's a great idea," said Jimmy. "Let's do it, will you?"

So it was agreed.

It was then in the late spring, and while the trotting track at the county fairgrounds, on the outskirts of the village, was not in the best condition, it had dried up after the spring thaw, and Josh thought he could arrange to get it rolled and dragged. He had been an ardent follower of the trotting races at the county fairs for years, and was well known to all the men who had anything to do with this sport. Hence he knew ways to get such things as this accomplished. The track was rolled and dragged.

To the casual observer there was nothing unusual in the sight of Jimmy and Josh driv-

ing down the street on a certain Saturday morning, with the dog Hezekiah running along beside the wagon. The town had become accustomed to Sister, and people no longer stared in awe as Jimmy drove her through the streets. But this was no ordinary morning, all the same. They were going to the fairgrounds, to give Sister a time trial on the trotting track. Jimmy could hardly contain himself. He felt as he sometimes had when on his way to take examinations in school—only this seemed more vital than mere school examinations. And he knew that Sister could not fail: there would be no "flunking" in this case. Whatever mark she set up would be good. It was simply a question of comparative degrees of excellence. She was fast, but how fast?

They drove into the fairgrounds—a barren, desert-like place except for the three days in the year when it burst into color with tents and banners and people—and over to the horse sheds. Josh had looked to all the details. He opened one of the sheds and produced a sulky—one of those light racing gigs,

which consist of little more than two rubber-tired wheels and a single seat—and they harnessed Sister into it.

Jimmy had half hoped that he would be allowed to do the driving, but he made no objection when Josh handed him the stop-watch and climbed into the seat. He knew that it is only by his legs that a driver holds himself in the seat of a real sulky, and his own legs were by no means equal to the task. He dismissed vain regrets, and prepared to take his delight in watching Sister show her speed.

This was something new for Sister. This light sulky to which she was hitched was as nothing in comparison with the heavier makeshift affair and the wagons and sleighs she had been accustomed to pull. It was almost as if she were out in the pasture again, free and untrammeled. The extreme lightness of her burden made her feel stronger; gave her the impression that she could go faster than ever.

Josh drove her out onto the track, and Jimmy followed with Hezekiah. Josh drove her up and down the front of the track. She

stepped high and gracefully. Jimmy, taking a place in front of the judge's stand, looked at her as at a creature he had never seen before. Stepping proudly up and down the track, she seemed a different horse, more glorious, more aristocratic.

The lithe muscles of her flank rippled under her smooth, gleaming chestnut coat. Her fine nostrils seemed to reach out and demand a full portion of the clear, spring air. Her sensitive, cup-like ears flicked forward and back, attuning themselves at once to Josh's soft commands and any sounds that might come from other directions.

"She takes to this outfit like a duck takes to water," said Josh, pulling up in front of Jimmy.

"She looks like a million dollars," Jimmy replied.

Then Josh gave him a few final instructions. He would drive up the track and turn, giving Sister a start in which to hit her stride. When they passed Jimmy, she should be in full trot. Jimmy was to snap the watch then,

and wait until Josh had driven twice around the half-mile track before snapping it again.

Only one thing went wrong with the start. As Sister came tearing down the track, Hezekiah grew greatly excited. He started to bark and dance about.

"No, no," Jimmy shouted at him, but the boy was so excited himself that his words only served to excite the dog still more.

Jimmy had the presence of mind to snap the stop-watch as Sister flew by, but Hezekiah, barking furiously, could not control himself. He scampered madly after the racing horse, and for once his head so whirled with wild joy that he could not hear Jimmy's commanding whistle—or, if he heard, he could not analyze the sound.

But the pace was too swift for him, and he soon returned to Jimmy's side. The boy seized him by the collar with one hand, and stroked him with the other, so that when Sister came around again he could not repeat his chase, though he barked once or twice and pulled a little at his collar.

On the second lap Jimmy turned his atten-

tion to Sister. She was trotting smoothly, and moving along so fast that Jimmy had to keep his head moving to follow her with his eyes. Her long legs—once so pitiful—now moved with the even rapidity of cogs in a machine.

"Boy, she's a beauty," Jimmy muttered to himself.

As she started down the home stretch, Jimmy held his watch before him, restraining the eager dog with the other hand. He could hear Josh talking to her as they drew nearer.

"Ah-h-h, ah-h-h, ah-h-h," was all he seemed to be saying, but it had its effect, and Sister rushed on, her feet beating a tattoo on the turf.

"Now," Josh yelled, as they passed the stand, and Jimmy snapped the watch.

He looked at it as Josh pulled the unwilling Sister down to a slower trot, and turned her around.

"Two minutes, twenty-eight and one-fifth seconds," he yelled at Josh.

"No?" said Josh, incredulous.

He waited for Jimmy to throw a blanket

over Sister, then hopped out of the sulky and took the watch while Jimmy held the horse's head.

"By golly, you're right," he said. "That's awful fast time for a green mare on a track like this. Guess that start-off Hezekiah gave her was just what she needed."

"That's as fast as a lot of races, isn't it?" asked Jimmy.

"Pretty near," said Josh. "I never s'posed she could do it."

When they were back in Dr. Burbank's stable again, giving Sister a well-earned rub-down, Josh paused in his work for a moment and looked at Jimmy speculatively

"If I were you," he said, "I don't think I'd say anything to folks about this just yet."

"Why not?" asked Jimmy.

"Wa'l, some folks might not believe ye. An' then, besides, if you should decide to do any racin' with her, it'd be just as well not to have it known how fast she can travel."

"Racing?" said Jimmy. "I'm not going to race Sister."

"I don't suppose ye had thought much about it," Josh admitted. And he resumed his work.

But it started Jimmy thinking. He had never had a very favorable impression of men who took part in horse races, though he knew that Josh himself had dabbled in the sport. He certainly would never permit Sister to be turned over to men who would mistreat her. Still there was some potent appeal in the thought of Sister as a victor in a big race.

"They don't use race horses very well, do they?" he asked after turning the matter over in his mind.

"It all depends on who ye mean by 'they,'" said Josh. "I've known race hosses to be abused, and I've known 'em to be treated better'n a parcel of kings."

They relapsed into silence.

"Now if you was thinkin' of racin' Sister," Josh resumed, after a few minutes, "I might take on the job of trainin' her myself. I used to know a thing or two about that sort of business, and you'd know I was treatin' her alright, I guess."

"That would be great," said Jimmy, beginning to grow enthusiastic at the idea. But then a new objection occurred to him. "But you couldn't drive her in the races, could you?"

"No, I s'pose I'm gettin' too old and too heavy for that," he admitted. "I was thinkin' Gil Morag might do it, though."

"I never thought of him," said Jimmy, as though he had been weighing the problem in his mind for weeks. "He'd be good to her, wouldn't he?"

Josh nodded.

"I wonder what Dad would say about it," said Jimmy.

"Wa'l, now, I might sort of sound him out on it for ye," Josh volunteered.

"Would you, Josh? That would be mighty good of you." Jimmy was all enthusiasm now.

Josh grinned. "Good of me?" he said. "I'll have as much fun out of it as you will; don't worry."

Then the conspirators put their heads to-

gether, and began to work out the best method of winning the doctor's approval.

"Two-twenty-eight-and-a-fifth," Josh mumbled, shaking his head, as he walked home, after the conference ended.

And Jimmy, gazing at the future race horse, muttered, "Weak-Kneed Sister."

CHAPTER XIV

THE FIRST RACE

JOSH and Jimmy had decided that it would be wiser to have all the details worked out before broaching to Dr. Burbank the subject of converting Sister into a race horse. The doctor had always enjoyed a good horse race, but both Jimmy and Josh knew that he had some very pronounced and unfavorable ideas about many of the professional racing men and so-called sportsmen who dominated the sport. It was from the doctor, indeed, that Jimmy had acquired his vague notion that race horses were likely to be mistreated. Hence he had many misgivings as to whether his father would approve the step which Josh had made to seem so attractive.

They decided to bring Gil Morag into the conspiracy before going any farther. If Gil would agree to do the driving, and help in

the preliminary training, that would be one of the doctor's certain questions answered before he asked it. Because Gil was the right sort.

He was not a very prosperous citizen, but everybody had a good word for Gil Morag. He was something of a town character, one of those restless, roving men who would have migrated to the frontier in the days when there still was a frontier. That being denied him, he had joined the navy in his youth, though every one wondered how he had persuaded the recruiting officers to take him, being so diminutive in stature. Later he had gone West, hoping that there might yet be some adventure to be found on the prairie, but he soon found the life of a modern cowboy irksome, and returned to Bryantsville. Here he had settled down to be a jack-of-all-trades, doing a little carpentering, a little plumbing, or almost anything else that came in his way.

And among all his other accomplishments he was an expert horseman. Where he had learned to drive race horses nobody knew, any more than they knew where he had learned

to do the multitude of other things that he did. But he had learned it somewhere, and hardly a fall went by but he was making the circuit of the county fairs, driving horses for somebody or other. And what was more, it was well known that he would stand for no mistreatment of the horses that he drove.

This, then, was the man whom Josh and Jimmy sought. They found him mending a chair on his back porch. He removed a half dozen tacks from his lips as his visitors entered.

"Howdy, gents," he said. "I'm glad to see you're both in good company."

"Gettin' warmer, ain't it?" said Josh, by way of greeting.

"The temperature," said Gil, making a great business of looking at a thermometer on the wall, "is slightly higher than it was yesterday."

Josh paid no attention to the elaborate byplay, but quickly got down to business. When he confided the time in which Sister had trotted the mile, Gil whistled.

"Either your watch is cuckoo, or you are,

or that horse is a seven-days' wonder," he said. "Anyhow, I'll take a chance. Count me in."

So that was settled.

The next thing was to get the approval of Jimmy's father, but that turned out to be easier than they had expected, even though it meant that Jimmy would stay in the village this summer and help Josh and Gil get Sister in shape, instead of going to the farm as he had done every summer for several years.

But Dr. Burbank had complete faith in Josh, liked Gil Morag, and found it difficult to refuse his son anything that would tend to increase his pleasure in life. Furthermore, he reasoned, it was Jimmy's horse, and he felt that Jimmy was entitled to decide her fate now.

Josh, Gil, and Jimmy now settled down in earnest to develop Sister into a race horse. But they went about it quietly, Josh and Gil stressing the wisdom of keeping her abilities unknown for the present.

"Ye see," said Josh, "it'll be just as well not to get her into too fast company right

away, because she'd be apt to break her heart tryin' to beat 'em. But if she gets into her stride sort of gradual, she'll be beatin' the best of 'em 'fore she's through."

So Jimmy, difficult as it was to keep the great secret in his breast, followed the advice of his more experienced associates.

And now, as the summer advanced, there were almost daily trips out to the fairgrounds, where Gil Morag would put Sister through her paces on the track. Josh, all enthusiasm, neglected his business shamefully in order to supervise the mare's training.

"Oh, well," he would say, if Jimmy or Dr. Burbank remonstrated with him for giving up so much of his time, "I ain't mechanically minded, anyway, and that young feller I've got workin' for me in the garage runs the business better when I'm away than when I'm there."

As for Gil, the doctor insisted on paying him for his share in the training of Sister, although Gil insisted—improvident soul that he was—that he got so much pleasure out of

driving her that he ought not to take any pay for it.

But for all the lavish attentions that Josh and Gil were now showing Sister, she remained primarily Jimmy's horse. Her head would bob and her ears flip forward when Jimmy's thumping tread made itself heard in the stable, and she seemed to relish a fast trot around the track more when Jimmy was present at the start to speak a few encouraging words to her.

They continued to hold time trials, and Sister continued to surprise them with her speed. Gil produced his own stop watch, and had Jimmy test her with that. The result was the same as with Josh's watch, and Gil was convinced.

"It's too good to be true," he declared, "but that watch never lied to me yet, and I'll take what it says for gospel now."

The first county fair of the season in the state was the Remson fair, and after many conferences it was decided to take Sister to Remson and try her out there. As she had never raced before, she had no official record,

and she was therefore entered in the 2:24 class, one of the slowest races at the fair.

Josh gave Gil minute instructions, which were quite unnecessary. "Don't push her too hard," he said. "Win the race, but don't try to leave the others too far behind. We don't want to have her clocked in too fast time, or she'll be getting into the fast races before we're ready for it."

Gil grinned and nodded, but Jimmy demurred. "I should think we ought to do the very best with her that we can," he argued.

"We'll have to, a little later," said Josh. "There ain't no use in makin' her work any harder'n she has to."

"Don't worry, Jimmy, old-timer," put in Gil. "You'll see her racin' all right. Josh is just bein' optimistic."

They took her to Remson a week early, in order to get her rested up and accustomed to the track. A few horses were there before them, and others were arriving. With them were owners, drivers, trainers, grooms, and various other members of the horse-racing fraternity. Jimmy stayed close by Josh and Gil,

and followed their example in making only the most moderate and modest statements about his horse, when talking with the other men.

He found that Josh and Gil knew almost all the men who were there with horses. Some of them they avoided; others they chatted with.

"There ain't nobody in the world better'n a good hoss man," Josh told Jimmy, "and nobody worser'n a bad one."

But good and bad were both gathering at the fairgrounds. Day by day the scene around the horse sheds became more animated. Men led horses up and down in front of the sheds, blanketed from ears to tail. Others worked over their horses in the sheds, rubbing them down, winding supports around their legs, adjusting their shoes. Others drove them out in the sulkies for exercise. And as the men met one another they chatted and joked, each trying to find out something about the other's horses, and trying to evade talking about his own. Jimmy learned the diplomacy of the horse sheds, in which Josh had already been tutoring him.

And then, as the opening day of the fair drew nearer, there began to be activity in other parts of the fairgrounds. Farmers were bringing cattle and pigs to the sheds, and hens, ducks, geese, and turkeys to the poultry hall. Their wives were bustling around the exhibition hall with all manner of things—cheeses, jellies, canned fruits, bedquilts, fancy work, and a thousand and one other home products. A ferris wheel was being put together in one corner of the grounds, and a merry-go-round in another, while traveling showmen and frankfort vendors hammered away at their tents and booths on what would be the midway.

All this activity Jimmy noticed with inattentive eyes. His thoughts were devoted entirely to Sister and her coming race. Would she prove her mettle? Or would she lose heart in an actual race and fall behind, as he had heard of promising horses doing?

The opening day of the fair arrived. Sister's race was the first one on the day's program. Josh, Gil, and Jimmy were at the sheds early in the morning, giving her break-

fast. Later Gil drove her around the track for a final work-out, then brought her back, fussed over her a bit, and put her in her stall.

"Now we'll just leave her to be quiet till this afternoon," said Josh.

That meant that Jimmy just had to bide his time as best he might. It was a very hard thing to do. The hours dragged by. He spent most of the time sitting on a pile of straw in front of Sister's stall. Eventually the early arrivals began to saunter by, on their way to the grandstand. In their wake came a boy selling score cards.

"Score cards, score cards, program of the afternoon races." It was like a lullaby, rhythmic, crooning.

Jimmy bought a score card, and thrilled as he read:

"Weak-Kneed Sister, ch. m., James Burbank, Jr."

There it was in black and white. Sister was a full-fledged race horse.

Josh and Gil appeared from somewhere,

and brought Sister out of the stall for a final inspection. She stepped out with the proud bearing of a creature that is perfect,—a haughty creature,—almost sullen. And then Jimmy spoke to her.

"Sister. Nice girl," he said.

She tossed her head, whinnied softly, and if there had been anything sullen in her bearing it was lost on the instant.

"Nice girl," he repeated, rubbing her nose.

Then a man galloped around the corner of the grandstand on horseback.

"First call for the two-twenty-four trot," he bawled.

Josh and Gil jumped into action, strapped on Sister's harness and hitched her into the sulky. Another call came, and Gil climbed into the sulky and drove out to the track. He drove up and down the front of the track until the other horses were assembled, and all was in readiness.

Jimmy and Josh watched Sister's behavior. She appeared calm, unperturbed by the other

horses around her. Gil and the other drivers drew lots for starting positions. Gil drew the pole position—the place farthest inside.

A false start or two, and then they were off. Sister, having the advantage of the start, took the lead. The other four horses in the race strung out behind her. All the way around the track she led them. Two of them were close behind, the others dropping farther back. As they came down the front of the track again, the first time around, one of the others tried to pass Sister. Gil glanced out of the corner of his eye, leaned forward a bit —and Sister seemed to shoot forward. The pursuer fell back.

"Um," Josh muttered.

"He almost passed," Jimmy gasped.

"Guess not," said Josh. "Just made Gil let her out a notch."

Gradually Sister increased her lead, as they sped on the second lap. She came into the home stretch three good lengths ahead. Gil was plainly trying to slow her down. She crossed the line an easy winner.

"Boy, that was exciting," Jimmy sighed.

Josh grinned. "Bet the folks in the grandstand didn't think so. It was a walk-away."

Sister had won the first heat of the race. There were two more heats to follow during the afternoon. But Josh and Gil seemed to think that it was all settled now.

"It's just a question of keepin' her from hangin' up too fast a record," said Josh. "There ain't nothin' in that race that can stop her."

And the events bore out his words. The second and third heats were just repetitions of the first. Sister's lead was never seriously threatened.

After the third heat Jimmy plied his canes and his unwieldy legs as fast as he could toward the shed, where Gil and Josh already were taking Sister out of her harness. His joy was complete. The warm, horsey smell of the sheds was pleasant in his nostrils: it was all a part of this supreme moment.

"Hurray," he yelled, as Josh and Gil paused to greet him.

And then he stopped. His smile of happiness faded for the moment. For just beyond

Josh and Gil were Preston Gilligan and his father, looking at Sister in an appraising way that grated on Jimmy's nerves.

But then the smile slowly respread itself on his face.

"Hurray," he yelled again.

CHAPTER XV

A RIVAL ON THE HORIZON

THE county-fair season began at Remson, but it would continue all over the state, lasting until late in the fall. Hardly a county but had its county fair, and some of the more far-flung counties had two or three in different parts of their borders.

The fairs were—and are—the annual reunions of the countrysides. For two or three days each year the fairgrounds become a rural metropolis. Farmers and villagers, old and young, male and female, elbow their way through the holiday throngs until they find the diversion that suits their taste. The mechanical music of the merry-go-round is punctuated by the hoarse shouts of the side-show barkers and vendors of sundry small and tempting wares—side-show men and vendors alike being lumped together by their custom-

ers under the blunt but unreproachful name of "fakers." Off to one side of the midway are the cattle and poultry and farm exhibits, the original bulwarks of the fair, while at the other side is the race track, still devoted to the sport of horses even though the spectators come nowadays in automobiles and busses instead of buggies and hayracks.

Like everything else, the county fair has felt the force of evolution. Once it was a purely local institution. The farmer brought in his cattle and his horses, and the villager and neighborhood peddler took advantage of the occasion to sell their wares. But the "fakers" began to come in and crowd out the local peddlers, and men began to bring in race horses that set too fast a pace for the local champions. Only the cattle show and agricultural exhibition remained local.

So there came to be a migration of both "fakers" and race horses from one fair to another. Sister had now become a part of this annual migration.

From Remson she went to Teasdale, and from Teasdale to South Melville, and thence

to another fair and yet others. Jimmy saw her win her race at Teasdale and again at South Melville. And he saw the stable followers watching her with a new respect whenever Gil or Josh brought her out. She was beginning to be known as a remarkable three-year-old.

It was when they were at South Melville that her fame became firmly established by the power of publicity. A Boston newspaper reporter, happening to be in town on some other matter, heard something of her story in the lobby of the little tavern where the racing men met for gossip in the evenings. He immediately sought out Jimmy and began to ask him questions. Jimmy gave him a modest account of Sister's history, but the reporter managed to get other details from Josh and Gil, and the result of his enterprise was a front-page story in his paper the next day. Other papers took up the story, and several different versions of it appeared, but all redounded to the fame of Sister and her young owner. The fact that she was winning races consistently kept her fame alive.

But while Sister's early history won her a

place on the front pages, she was not the only three-year-old in the state that year who was gaining the recognition of the racing fraternity. Mr. Gilligan had a mare named Lady Excelsior who also was winning races in fast time. She, too, had been an unknown at the beginning of the season, and while the world in general still knew little of her, the followers of horse races were watching her career with interest.

There were almost always two fairs going on in different parts of the state at the same time, and whether by chance or strategy, Mr. Gilligan's three-year-old seemed never to be at the same fair with Sister. Yet the progress of the two mares was almost parallel. Both were winning their races, and moving forward constantly into faster classes.

Around the horse sheds and in the hotel lobbies the question of when these two equine prodigies would meet one another became a subject of continual speculation. It was the professed opinion of some that there was an agreement to keep the two horses apart until each should have built up her reputation.

Others held that pure chance was postponing the inevitable meeting, and predicted a battle royal when the great day should finally dawn.

Josh Thibber came in for a great deal of questioning. "See here, you old fox," one shifty old veteran of the tracks said to him, "what kind of a game you playin' with this feller Gilligan, anyhow?"

"We're mindin' our own business, and I s'pose he is," said Josh.

"I s'pose you are," the other admitted, "but I have my doubts of Gilligan. I never knew him to pass up a chance like this before. Why, don't you see you could clean up a small fortune keepin' them hosses together? First one would win, and then t'other would win, and everybody'd be crazy to bet good money, and if you was wise you'd know which was goin' to win all the time."

"We don't play that game," said Josh, dryly.

"No, I never figgered you did," said the veteran, almost wistfully. "Seems a shame to me. Gilligan wouldn't be above it, but I s'pose he knows you're hopelessly honest."

The old man seemed so sincerely mournful about Josh's honesty, that the latter could not be angry. He grinned. "I cal'late we'll get together some day," he said, "and then you can bet your last dollar if you want to—but nobody'll know who's goin' to win till the race is all over."

"I wouldn't bet a red cent either way," said the old man. "But I'd like to have your chance—the one you'll throw away."

Josh grinned again, and left him.

Jimmy, overhearing this and other conversations, pressed Josh and Gil for an explanation of the failure of Lady Excelsior and Sister to come together. He was both eager for the race to take place and fearful of its outcome. But Josh and Gil declined to get excited.

"Maybe Gilligan's fightin' shy of us on purpose, and maybe he ain't," said Josh. "But whichever way the wind blows, t'ain't much use to worry about it. Our job's to win races with Sister, and seems to me we're doin' a pretty good job of it."

"You see, Jimmy, old bean," Gil elaborated,

"the ways of some hoss men are as dark and peculiar as a Chinaman's, and Squire Hokus-Pokus Gilligan is one of that breed. You can't tell where he's at nor what he's up to. But so far as that goes, it don't make any difference anyhow, because we'll be ready to race his mare any time she comes along, whether it's to-morrow or next year."

Thus Sister's career went on, her handlers philosophical and undisturbed by the reports of a real rival in the offing.

But now, with the South Melville fair coming to an end, Jimmy had to leave his precious charge in the hands of Josh and Gil and return to Bryantsville. It was time for the high school to reopen. He would be a senior now. Never had the thought of returning to school been so irksome to him. He considered writing to his father and asking permission to attend one more fair before taking leave of Sister, but he gave up the thought, deciding that it would be unfair to ask more after the generous way in which his father had treated him.

There was nothing left, then, but to say his

farewells. Sister had won another race that day, and he lurked around the corner of the horse sheds until Josh and Gil had taken care of her and left her for a final rest, in preparation for the departure to the next fair. He watched them stroll off toward the midway, and disappear into the crowd.

Then, plying his two stout canes, he stumped over to Sister's stall. She whinnied lightly, recognizing him as he came in beside her.

"Good girl," he said, "good old Sister"—the usual greeting.

Sister flung her head around, and Jimmy leaned up against her. His arm went around her glossy neck, and his fingers played idly in her mane.

More and more, as he grew older, he was adopting the code of his father and Josh—the code that forbade the display of emotions. But he had not yet become so confirmed in stoicism as to conceal his emotions from himself. And now there was nobody present but himself and Sister.

With his arm resting around her neck, he

leaned his face, too, against her. His mind flashed back to the day when he had first seen her, a helpless, hopeless little creature. Then the day when he had first seen her standing on her own feet. And so up through the two years of her remarkable life.

Leaning close to her thus and musing, he felt anew that vague sense of kinship, and unconsciously his grasp around her neck tightened.

All he said was, "Good girl."

Then, realizing that he was hugging the horse, he turned self-conscious and slightly ashamed. He loosened his hold on her, and gave her a series of lordly, masculine pats.

"Good-by, old girl," he said brusquely, and then, swallowing a lump in his throat, he added, more softly, "Sister."

With a final pat on the neck, he gripped his canes tightly and walked out of the stall, striving to appear as matter-of-fact as if he had merely been tossing some straw on the floor. He glanced over toward the midway, but could not bring himself to join the holiday throng. Instead, he made his way to

the hotel. He seemed to be studying the sidewalk as he walked, but occasionally he threw his head back and defied anybody to suspect that he had been lost in sentimental thoughts. Then his head would drop again, and he continued to study the sidewalk.

His bags were all packed when Josh and Gil rejoined him at the hotel. They took him to the railroad station and saw him aboard the train.

"Sorry ye have to go, Jimmy," said Josh, "but I guess we can manage the mare all right now."

Jimmy was pleased at the implied compliment, but tried to turn it off. "Oh, you've managed her all the time," he said. "I was just having a good time."

"Don't you believe it," Josh denied. "You're that mare's big boss, and she knows it. I only hope she'll act as well for me and Gil as she has for you."

The train whistled and Jimmy shook hands with the two men. "Send me a telegram if you find we're due to race Lady Excelsior,

will you?" he called after them, as they retreated down the aisle of the train.

They nodded their agreement, and hopped back to the platform. The train pulled out. A few hours later the boy sat in his own home, relating to his father and mother the marvelous exploits of old Nettie's weak-kneed colt.

On the following Monday he was back at his desk at school. And if he had been a hero before, he was doubly so now. His picture had been on the front page of the newspapers. He was famous. Boys who had formerly tolerated him from pity now crowded around him, eager to hear his stories and bask in the reflected glory of his fame. Waiting for the bell to announce the beginning of the school day, they abandoned their games in the school yard, and hurried inside to talk with Jimmy.

Preston Gilligan came in and saw the crowd around Jimmy's desk. He clinched his teeth angrily, and started to walk by. But the boys whom he had dominated before were too absorbed in a new hero now to regard his anger.

"Hey, Press," Ned Long hailed him, as he passed, "did you see any of Sister's races?"

"Yes, I saw one," said Preston. "She hasn't shown anything yet."

The boys turned to Jimmy expectantly. Here was a new challenge.

"What do you want her to show?" Jimmy asked.

"Wait till she meets some real competition," said Preston. "Wait till she comes up against Lady Excelsior. If she does anything then, you can brag all you please—if she does."

"We're all ready for your Lady Excelsior," said Jimmy, "Bring her on."

"Don't you worry about that. She'll be brought on soon enough to give you a good licking," Preston flashed back.

And the bell announced the beginning of school.

CHAPTER XVI

MR. GILLIGAN TALKS BUSINESS

BRYANTSVILLE, the seat of Bryants County, was also the seat of the Bryants county fair. This was one of the last fairs of the season, and one of the biggest. Bryantsville people and all their neighbors for miles around looked forward to it as one of the great events of the year.

Jimmy and Josh had long ago decided, therefore, that it would be a fitting climax to Sister's racing season to enter her at the Bryantsville fair for her final race of the year. And now Jimmy, as he sat at his desk and tried to get the meaning of a passage in Virgil, or to unravel a problem in geometry, found his mind often leaving the work before him and running ahead to the forthcoming fair, when he would see Sister in action again

Thus the long days passed. Occasionally

came a note from Josh reassuring him that Sister was in the best of form. As to the results of her races, he kept himself posted by the newspapers—and was well satisfied. He kept himself posted, too, on the outcome of the races in which Lady Excelsior took part. Her progress continued to keep pace with Sister's, but still they went their separate ways.

And then came the telegram from Josh: "Sister and Lady Excelsior entered for same race at Bryantsville. Arrive twenty-fifth."

Here was great news. The race with Lady Excelsior, which every one had been talking about, was to take place at last. And it was to be right here in Bryantsville, where he could see it and help to urge Sister on. He fancied that Sister did better when he was on hand to encourage her. Since he had returned home, her time had fallen short of her record once or twice.

She would have to win. Anything else was unthinkable, with the race being run in Bryantsville where everybody he knew would be

watching. And Preston—Sister would just have to win.

The days dragged even more, now that the time was set when Sister would return for her supreme battle. The passages in Virgil seemed utterly beyond comprehension, and the geometry problems were hopelessly complicated. Walking to and from school, with the faithful Hezekiah at his heels, Jimmy marveled at the slow passage of time. Would the twenty-fifth never come?

It did come, and with it came Sister, Josh, and Gil. Jimmy went with them to the fairgrounds, where Sister was given a stall. Many of the other horses were arriving, and Jimmy recognized drivers and handlers among the men around the horse sheds. They recognized him, too, and greeted him warmly. The crippled boy had been a great favorite during his brief career as a camp follower.

But none was more glad to see him than Sister. Her delighted whinny was unmistakable. The way she stuck out her nose, and turned her eager ears forward—these things spoke a welcome that meant much to Jimmy.

"Good girl," he said. "Good old Sister."

And when Sister had been given her supper and left to rest, Josh and Jimmy sat down on a bundle of straw outside her stall.

"Wa'l," said Josh, "here we are right back where we started from."

"Remember that day we brought her over here and tried her out the first time?" said Jimmy. "I never thought she was going to be a real race horse then."

"I didn't have much idea of it myself," Josh admitted. "I certainly wouldn't have believed it that day you got your father to give her to ye."

He mused a moment, and then continued, "And she wouldn't have amounted to shucks, either, if you hadn't sort of shamed her into it."

"Oh, no," Jimmy objected. "All I did was take care of her. And I couldn't have done that if you hadn't helped me."

Josh shook his head. "I ain't much of a hand at figgerin' such things out," he meditated, "but somehow it seems to me that you

got right inside that hoss and made her want to amount to somethin'."

He cleared his throat, and made a great to-do about filling his pipe, taken aback at his own excursion into metaphysics.

"We'd better be gettin' home," he said. "It's comin' on supper time."

Gil, in the meantime, had gone to his own house, and had been surprised to find Mr. Gilligan sitting on the porch waiting for him.

"Hello, Squire," he said. Nobody else in town ever accorded this title to Mr. Gilligan, despite his attempts to appear the perfect country gentleman. Gil, however, always called him that, and though Mr. Gilligan knew there was an element of mischievousness in it, he delighted in hearing it none the less.

"Hello, Gil," he said. "I heard you were back today."

"Yes," said Gil, "that's the trouble with being famous. You don't get any privacy."

If this was meant as a hint, it had no effect on the complacently superior Mr. Gilligan. "I just got back from Lumsden myself," said he.

"That so?"

"Yes," said Mr. Gilligan. "By the way, I hear you've been having a pretty successful season with that Burbank mare."

"Tolerable," said Gil.

"This little Lady Excelsior of mine has been doing pretty well, too," said Mr. Gilligan. And he looked hard at the driver.

"I'm glad to hear it," said Gil.

"Yes," continued Mr. Gilligan, shifting about in his chair, "and I understand the two of them are going to be in the free-for-all Friday."

Again he looked meaningly at his hearer, but Gil gazed abstractedly at the ceiling. "So I'd heard," he admitted.

"Well," said Mr. Gilligan, suddenly sitting up very straight, "there's no use beating around the bush. I know a lot of men that would put up some good bets on that race. Why can't we make some little arrangements?"

"No," said Gil, bringing his gaze down from the ceiling and resting it squarely on his interviewer's face, "there is no use beating around the bush, as you say. And all the ar-

rangements I'm making on this race is to drive the boy's hoss—to win, if I can; to try to win, even if I can't."

"Now, Gil," said Mr. Gilligan, persuasively, "I'd be perfectly willing to make it well worth your while, you know, and—"

Gil waved his hand in contempt. "Nothing doing, Squire," he said, wearily. "I've heard all those arguments before. I'm sorry you came to me, because you know now that I'm out to win, and I s'pose you will get all your money laid down on our horse and have yours held back. It'll spoil the race, but the boy'll never know the difference, and there's nothing I can do about it, anyway."

"No," said Mr. Gilligan, emphatically, "I'm going to win this race, and you may as well get in on it now."

"Oho, so you've already laid your bets."

"That may be as may be. All I'm telling you is that I'm going to win the race."

"All right," said Gil, rising. "I guess that's all I want to hear from you, anyhow, Squire. There wasn't anything else you wanted to see me about, was there?"

"Now see here, Gil," Mr. Gilligan resumed, "you—"

But Gil had gone into the house and slammed the door. Mr. Gilligan hesitated a few moments, looking meditatively at the closed door. Then he clamped his hat down tighter on his head, and marched up the street. Presently he recollected that he was a country gentleman, and had to maintain his dignity. He readjusted his hat, and walked more composedly.

As he passed Dr. Burbank's house, Josh was just emerging from the door, having brought Jimmy home.

"Well, well, well," said Mr. Gilligan. "If it isn't Josh Thibber, as I live. How are you, Josh?"

"I can't complain," Josh confessed.

"I heard you came back to-day," Mr. Gilligan babbled on. "I'm just back in town myself."

"Guess we're both back for the same purpose," said Josh, dryly.

Mr. Gilligan's unusually ardent manner made him ill at ease.

"Ex-actly, Josh, ex-actly," Mr. Gilligan went on. "It seems we're going to have a little race on our hands."

"Um," said Josh.

"Now see here, Josh, you're handling the Burbank mare, as I understand it. Is that true?"

Josh nodded.

"Yes," said Mr. Gilligan, smoothly. "And naturally the thing you want to do is to handle her as profitably as you can—for her owner, I mean, of course."

"We've had a pretty good season so far as prize money goes," said Josh. "I guess the lad's satisfied with that end of it."

"Prize money," repeated Mr. Gilligan contemptuously. "Why that's chicken feed. Now I'm going to show you how to make some real money with her."

"I thought that was what you was drivin' at," Josh interrupted him. "I ain't interested."

"But it's only fair to Dr. Burbank and the boy," Mr. Gilligan argued. "You're throwing away somebody else's money."

"All right," Josh challenged. "Go see Dr. Burbank and the boy, if ye want to. But don't talk any more to me about real money. I ain't interested, and that's final."

Mr. Gilligan saw the uselessness of argument, and lapsed into silence. They walked on together.

"Wa'l," said Josh, "I hope this weather keeps up for the fair. Guess I'll step into the drug store a minute. Glad to have seen ye."

Mr. Gilligan walked on, without answering.

The next day, however, he appeared at Dr. Burbank's office.

"Doctor," he said, "I want to buy that little mare of yours."

The doctor, puzzled, wrinkled his brows. "Little mare?" he asked. "What little mare?"

"Why, the one Josh Thibber's handling for you."

"Oh," exclaimed the doctor. "You mean Sister. But she isn't mine, you know. She belongs to my boy."

"Well, of course I knew you let him call her his horse," Mr. Gilligan resumed, with a

knowing smile. "Good idea, too. I've often thought of trying the same thing with Preston to see if it wouldn't give him a little sense of responsibility. But I'm talking now of buying the mare, and naturally you couldn't leave a matter like that to the boy. Horse racing, you know, doctor, is hardly child's play."

"I've always been of that opinion," Dr. Burbank admitted.

"No child's play at all," Mr. Gilligan repeated, encouraged by the doctor's agreement. "And what is more, the buying and selling of race horses is an important part of horse racing."

"I suppose so," said the doctor.

"Yes, indeed," said Mr. Gilligan. "I'm glad to see that you agree with me. Now as to the mare, what price do you set on her?"

"I'm afraid you misunderstand me," said Dr. Burbank. "I quite agree with you that horse racing is no child's play. And I am inclined to believe from the way some people play it, that it isn't gentleman's play, either. But all that is beside the point. The horse you

want to buy doesn't belong to me. She belongs to my son. I doubt very much if he would sell her to you, but the question is entirely for him to decide."

He stepped to the door, opened it, and called out, "Jimmy."

"Yes?" said Jimmy, coming to the door.

"You know Mr. Gilligan, Jimmy?"

"Oh, yes," said Jimmy, seeing the visitor for the first time. "Hello, Mr. Gilligan."

"Mr. Gilligan," said the doctor, "has come to me with a proposal to buy your horse. Would you be interested in selling her?"

"Of course not," said Jimmy, smiling at the absurdity of the question.

"Very well," said Mr. Gilligan, lifting his eyebrows. He rose, took his hat, and walked to the door.

"Let me warn you, though," said he, turning at the threshold. "She'll be worth considerably less money after she is beaten next Friday."

Jimmy was about to retort, but he looked at his father and saw that the doctor was smiling at the other man's idle bluster. Jimmy smiled back at him, understandingly.

CHAPTER XVII

HEZEKIAH DOES HIS BIT

THE return of Sister to her native place had been a great event not only to Jimmy, but to the dog Hezekiah. His early jealousy of the horse long since dissipated, Hezekiah had passed through another stage in his relationship with her, and was now in yet a third stage. After the jealousy had worn away, and when Sister was still a puny and inactive colt, Hezekiah had taken a proprietary interest in her. He had accepted her on the theory that Jimmy was interested in her, and what interested Jimmy should likewise interest him. Thus he condescended to bestow his companionship upon the colt from time to time.

There were two reasons for his change to his final attitude toward Sister. One was that she was becoming stronger, larger, more active,

and in every way more admirable from the physical standpoint. As this metamorphosis took place in the horse, Hezekiah's sense of superiority naturally lessened. But even more important was his discovery that Sister, like himself, paid homage to Jimmy above all others. They worshipped at the same altar. The realization of this fact did not come to Hezekiah as a sudden stroke of light, but dawned on him gradually, so that he was never aware that his attitude toward Sister was undergoing any change. Yet change it did, and by the time Sister had become a race horse, he recognized her as an equal and cherished her as a friend.

After the first day on the race track, when he had started Sister off on her time trial with a salvo of barking, he had been made to realize that it was unseemly to bark and chase her at such times, and though he had found it difficult to suppress his excitement, he had done his best to remain calm and quiet as she trotted around the track.

And so, through the summer, he had been allowed to be a constant attendant at her try-

outs on the race track. It puzzled him that he should not be allowed to run with her on these occasions, but Jimmy willed otherwise. And Jimmy was all-wise. In the stable, when Sister was being rubbed and scrubbed, he always was an interested observer, occasionally making himself useful by trotting across the stable for a brush or other small articles which he could carry between his teeth. And at other times, when Sister was standing alone in her stall, he often would make himself comfortable just outside, and Sister would stick her head out through the open upper half of her door, and thus they would hold silent communion.

The departure of Sister for the Remson fair was a bad day for Hezekiah, for he was left without either Sister or Jimmy. He toured the village in search of entertainment, rode with the doctor in his car, and followed Mrs. Burbank around the house until, in exasperation at having him constantly under her feet, she found a bone and took it out in the yard for him. But none of these things overcame his sense of loneliness. Every once in a while

he trotted confidently into the stable, hoping that Sister would be back in her accustomed place; but these disappointing visits only increased his despondency, and he had to hurry outside and run as fast as he could up and down the street to convince himself that the world was worth while.

Jimmy's return, after a while, came as a great blessing to him. He resumed his old custom of going to school with the boy in the morning, and going to meet him again in the afternoon. After school he had Jimmy to himself, and though there might be nothing more exciting to do than to curl up on a rug while Jimmy read a book, Jimmy's presence made all the difference between boredom and content. Life was much as it had been in the days before Sister appeared. Yet it was not the same. He missed Sister. His occasional hopeful visits to her stall continued, always ending in disappointment. And he often heard Jimmy mention her name when he was talking with people. This served to bring her back to his mind, and he was lonesome for her.

Then she came back. Not to the stable, to

be sure, but she came back to Bryantsville. Hezekiah saw her at the fairgrounds. For all he knew, she might have been there all this while, but there she was now, anyway, and the dog barked his delight at seeing her again. After this reunion he passed more time at the fairgrounds than at home, but in this he was justified by Jimmy, who was there every available minute. Jimmy, however, went home at night to sleep, whereas Hezekiah became so enamoured of the place that he established headquarters in a pile of straw outside Sister's stall, and returned there to sleep almost every night after first going home with Jimmy.

The opening day of the fair came, and school was closed so that every one could attend. Jimmy was heartily glad of this dispensation, for Preston had been getting wordy again of late, and when they were in school together it was impossible for Jimmy to avoid him. Since Mr. Gilligan had returned home, Preston had become more and more confident of the outcome of the race between Sister and Lady Excelsior, and his boasting had become almost as unbearable as his former sneers and taunts.

Jimmy himself had the natural confidence of youth, but he realized that Lady Excelsior had equalled Sister's achievements thus far in their careers, and he admitted to himself that there was little reason for undue confidence on either side. Yet Preston's boasts grew constantly louder and more positive.

He seldom addressed his remarks directly to Jimmy, but rather to the other boys, making sure, however, that Jimmy was in earshot and that his voice was loud enough to be heard by Sister's owner.

"You'll see," he would say, "just how much that Burbank plug amounts to. Why, our mare is going to give her such a licking that Jimmy Burbank will be ashamed to show his face around here again. It's lucky he got his picture in the papers before this race came off, that's all. I happen to know that my father has bet a lot of money on this race, and he never bets unless he knows he's going to win."

But now the fair was starting, and Jimmy no longer had to listen to Preston's irritating talk. Instead, he listened to Josh and Gil,

whose talk was much more agreeable. They assured him that Sister was "fit as a fiddle," and were very optimistic about the outcome of the impending race. When Jimmy, with some concern, told them of Preston's words about his father, they grinned at each other in confidential amusement.

"Guess the boy was more'n half right," Josh smiled, "but it looks like this was once when old Luther counted his eggs before they was hatched."

"If he knows how this race is comin' out," put in Gil, "then he ought to go into the fortune-tellin' business. Not but what he's tried hard enough to find out." And he winked at Josh.

"How was that?" Jimmy asked. He had not been told of the activities of Mr. Gilligan prior to his attempt to purchase Sister.

"Oh, nothin'," said Josh quickly. "Gil just means he's been snoopin' around a little, that's all. Tryin' to find out if Sister's as good as she's cracked up to be."

The hurried evasiveness of the answer aroused Jimmy's suspicions, but he knew that

it was of no use to try to worm any more information out of either Josh or Gil. He began to recall stories that he had heard of trickery on the race-tracks—stories which he had put out of his mind as absurd since he had come into close contact with race-track men and found them congenial and friendly. The stories came back to him now, and troubled him. Suppose they were true, after all? Suppose some of the underhanded tactics of which he had heard should be applied to Sister? Suppose anything should happen to her on the eve of the race?

"You don't suppose," he said, after a silence, "that he might try to do anything to Sister, do you?"

"No, no," said Josh and Gil in unison, startled at the turn his mind had taken.

"No," said Josh again, as Gil subsided, "those things only happen in the storybooks. Don't ye worry about anything happenin' to her. All I meant by 'snoopin' around' was that he was askin' Gil and me questions about her. No, no. Of course nothin'll happen to her. The idea!"

He paused, at a loss for words strong enough to express the absurdity of Jimmy's suggestion. But Jimmy was already reassured and slightly ashamed. The subject was dropped.

The fair was to last three days, but Sister was entered only in one race, and that came on the last day. Lady Excelsior ran in another race the first day, and won it easily in straight heats. It was the first time either Jimmy, Josh, or Gil had seen her in action, and they watched her carefully. She was a black mare, somewhat smaller than Sister, but full of nervous energy. Her hoofs rose and fell with the swift ease of automatons. In the second heat she became so eager to go faster and ever faster that she broke her gait into a gallop, and had to be pulled back into an even trot again, thereby losing ground; but she was so far ahead of the field that it did not matter.

"She's some hoss, all right," Josh admitted, admiringly.

"She'd better not be breakin' day after tomorrow, though, I'll tell her that," said Gil.

"Do you think Sister can beat her?" Jimmy asked, eagerly.

The two men smiled. "Course we'll beat her," said Josh.

"Sure we will," said Gil.

But Jimmy thought they seemed less confident than before.

On the second day of the fair he could summon no interest in the races. The only race he wanted to see now was the race in which Sister and Lady Excelsior would battle for supremacy. And that race was still a whole day in the future.

"Jimmy," said Mrs. Burbank, as he was leaving the house in the morning, "I don't believe you've seen a thing of the fair except those old horse sheds. Why don't you go with the other boys to-day and see some of the shows and things?"

"All right," said Jimmy. "I guess I will." And he tried to follow her suggestion.

But the wild woman from Timbuctoo and the five-legged cow and the wrestler who challenged all comers were alike without appeal to him. He failed to get the usual thrill out

of a ride on the ferris wheel, and even when he won a jackknife by throwing a hoop over it he was still thinking of the morrow's great race. Neither hot frankforts nor peanuts could absorb his attention, though he munched them resolutely. Walking up and down the crowded midway with the other boys was too much of a task for one who had to ply his way with canes. And though he sat down on the steps of the exhibition hall and watched the crowds weaving here and there, and listened to the confused medley of sounds,—the mechanical music, the shouts of the barkers, the cracking of whips against canvas lithographs, the beating of the wild woman's tom-tom, and the conversational buzz and laughter of the crowd,—still he could not blend his own thoughts into this holiday jumble.

He lunched on frankforts, strawberry soda, and ice-cream cones, and made his way back to the horse sheds. Sister whinnied, and Hezekiah barked a greeting. He took his accustomed seat on a bale of straw, feeling much more content, and sat there throughout the afternoon, watching drivers and grooms as they

hurried by him on their way to the track, and as they returned, either jubilant over a victory or silent in defeat.

After the races Josh and Gil joined him. They took Sister out for a little exercise, then brought her back and rubbed her down, fed her, and made her comfortable for the night.

"Well, sir," said Josh, as they turned homeward, "to-morrow night at this time it'll be all over."

Jimmy nodded. Then he turned and looked around. "Where's Hezekiah?" he asked.

"He was asleep back there in the straw last I knew," said Gil.

"Oh, all right," said Jimmy. "I guess he'll be all right there."

They proceeded home, leaving Hezekiah behind with Sister.

Later in the evening Josh called at the Burbank home and asked for Jimmy. "I forgot that crupper that needed fixin'," he said. "I'm goin' over to the fairgrounds after it. Want to come?"

"Sure," said Jimmy, and they got into Josh's

car—one of those for which he was the local agent—and drove toward the fairgrounds.

As they approached the gate they were surprised to see Mr. Gilligan come running out as fast as his legs would carry him, hatless and breathless. The big electric light over the gate shed its rays full on him, while the lights of the car illuminated him still more. He paused as he saw the car turning into the gateway, glanced furtively behind him, as if fearing pursuit, and then stood at one side as Josh stopped the car beside him.

"What's the matter, Luther?" Josh called out.

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all," said Mr. Gilligan, nervously, fidgeting with a little green bottle which he had been grasping firmly in his hand. "That is, a dog was chasing me That's all." He looked at the bottle in his hand, and appeared surprised, as if he had not realized it was there before. He hastily stuck it into his coat pocket.

"I guess the dog's gone now," he said. "I'd better go in and get my car."

"Want a lift?" Josh offered.

"No, thanks. It's just around the corner here."

Mr. Gilligan turned and reëntered the fairgrounds. And as he turned, Josh and Jimmy could see that a strip was torn out of the leg of his trousers.

"Guess the dog got him," Josh laughed.

"Had he been drinking?" Jimmy asked, remembering the bottle.

"No, I don't think so," said Josh. "That was a medicine bottle he had. Prob'ly something for his mare."

They drove on to the horse sheds, and as the lights struck Sister's stall, both spoke at once: "Look. The door's open."

Josh stopped the car and jumped out. "If anybody's been tamperin'—" he muttered, running to the stall.

Jimmy followed as fast as he could, but Josh called out before he got there. "It's all right. She's in here. She's all right."

Josh was looking at the horse with the aid of a flashlight. "Funny about that door," he said, as if to himself.

He came out and his light fell on Hezekiah.

The dog was crouched on his pile of straw, chewing a piece of cloth. The cloth matched Mr. Gilligan's trousers.

"So?" said Josh. "Good dog, Hezekiah."

"But he shouldn't have chased—" Jimmy started to say. And then he realized what it all meant. The open door. The bottle. Mr. Gilligan's trousers. "You mean—?"

Josh nodded. "I mean Hezekiah saved Sister from bein' tampered with," he said.

CHAPTER XVIII

JIMMY MAKES UP HIS MIND

JIMMY went to bed that night in a very troubled state of mind. He had never liked Mr. Gilligan very well, but his reasons for dislike were vague, because his acquaintance with the man was slight. Yet he had seen Mr. Gilligan here and there all his life; he knew that he held his head high in the community. And now he had tried to play a despicable trick. Josh admitted that the evidence was overwhelming.

It shook Jimmy's faith in human nature. He had known that all men were not like his father and Josh, but it had never occurred to him that any one whom he knew as well as Mr. Gilligan would stoop to such cowardly and dishonorable methods of accomplishing his ends as he seemed to have done. He had become accustomed to the belief that down-

right villainy existed only in fiction, or, at least, only in places and circumstances so remote as to be the next thing to fiction. He had lived long enough to know that most men are given to little meannesses and to occasional variations from the way of strict honesty, but nothing in his life had prepared him for such a complete reversal of the code of honor as now revealed itself to him.

Jimmy tossed in his bed, trying to think the thing out. His mind wandered back over Sister's history, and then returned to the present, and he remembered, almost with surprise, that to-morrow was the day of her big race. And to think that Mr. Gilligan had tried to injure her. He was not at all certain just what the little green bottle might have contained, but it must have been something to harm the horse. Josh had said that Mr. Gilligan would not have attempted to give her deadly poison, or even anything which would keep her out of the race—probably some drug which would merely have upset her temporarily and made her sluggish. And Josh had assured himself and Jimmy, by a thorough ex-

amination, that even this much had not been accomplished. Hezekiah had acted in time. Yet the thought that an attempt had been made was enough to keep Jimmy awake, tossing in his bed.

But eventually he fell into a deep sleep, so that it seemed that he had hardly stopped thinking about the night's developments when his father's voice, from the foot of the stairs, informed him that it was time for breakfast. He opened his eyes sleepily, dreading to get up, and then he realized that it was the day of the race. He jumped out of bed with alacrity, and dressed himself.

Josh called for him before he was through breakfast, and they were soon on their way to the fairgrounds. Not a word was spoken of their last night's discovery until they had arrived and attended to giving Sister her breakfast. Then, while waiting for her to eat, they sat down outside the stall. Here Gil joined them.

"Well," said the driver, "I guess we're all ready to show Squire Gilligan a thing or two, eh?"

"Yes, I guess so," said Josh. And then he told Gil what had happened the night before. Gil listened in amazement, occasionally interjecting a question.

"The low-down, ornery rat," he pronounced slowly, when Josh had finished. Then, noticing that Jimmy was glum and silent, he assumed a lighter mood, attempting to relieve the boy's mind.

"Well, there's just one thing about it," he said confidently. "We'll have to lick him all the worse for this little trick."

But Jimmy observed that he did not question the theory that Mr. Gilligan had intended to harm Sister. And Jimmy reached a decision.

"I hope we win," he said evenly, "because Sister won't race any more after to-day."

The two men took the astounding announcement in silence, though both opened their mouths in surprise, and then closed them again without speaking. There was a note of authority in the lad's voice that admitted no argument. He seemed all at once to have gained a maturity incommensurate with his years.

Both men felt instinctively that to attempt to dissuade him from his decision would be a breach of the respect which one man accorded another man, according to their code, until he showed himself unworthy of it. Yet they had never thought of Jimmy as a man before.

Josh was the first to compose himself. "Her last race, is it?" he said, almost musingly. "Well—" His voice lingered on the word, and then fell and converted itself into a sigh.

"Yes," said Jimmy, trying to frame his thoughts into an explanation that would sound reasonable. "I—I guess I think too much of Sister to take any more chances with her."

"Course t'ain't likely such a thing would ever happen again in a hundred years," said Gil. "Still I wouldn't say a word to change your mind."

"I suppose I'm a rotten sportsman," said Jimmy, "but I can't help it. That's the way I feel about it. It isn't as if I was the one who was taking the chances. It's Sister."

Josh scratched his head and meditated. "I dunno," he said, at last. "I almost think I'm of your way of thinkin'. I've been mixed up

with hoss racin' a good many years—long before you was born—and I always said there warn't no better sport in the world. And I s'pose there's always been jest such low-life fellers as Luther Gilligan playin' the game, too. Only I never happened to run afoul of 'em before.

"But I've had my taste of it now, and I cal'late maybe I've had enough. I was luckier'n you in goin' a long time before gettin' my belly full, as the feller says, but I sort of got you into it, and I ain't got a word to say against your pullin' out, and takin' me with ye.

"Course it seems sort of too bad, in one way. There's Sister, as fine a piece of horseflesh as ever trotted on this track, and her only a three-year-old. I kinder hate to think of her goin' to seed, and I ain't at all sure but she'd choose to keep right on racin', if ye gave her any say-so about it. But she's your hoss, and it's up to you to decide what she'll do. If you've decided, that's enough for me."

"Yes, I guess my mind is made up," said Jimmy. "Maybe, as you say, she would rather

race if we could ask her, but we can't ask her —or, at least, she can't tell us. So I guess I'll have to decide for her, and call it enough."

"Well," said Gil, refusing to be discouraged by the failure of his previous attempt to lighten the spirits of the party, "that only makes it all the more important for us to give the Squire a real good lambastin' to remember us by."

But Josh, for once, was beyond rising to the occasion. "Squire," he repeated, scornfully. "What do ye call him 'Squire' for? The only 'Squire' I ever knew was old Squire Judkins, and Luther Gilligan ain't fit to be mentioned in the same breath with him."

"I'll tell you," said Gil. "I read a book once all about a swell farmer in England. Sort of a gentleman farmer, he was, and all the small fry around the place where he lived thought he was just a few steps below the king. And I couldn't help thinkin' that Luther was tryin' to make us small fry around here think he was just such a swell as that, himself. I called him 'Squire' one day, just to sort of try him out, and he preened himself like a rooster, so I could see I had hit the nail on the head.

It tickled my funnybone so that I've called him that ever since."

Jimmy smiled at the narrative, but Josh was in too serious a frame of mind to appreciate sly humor.

"I've known Luther Gilligan ever since he settled down here twenty years ago," said Josh, "and I must say I never thought much of him. But I never supposed he'd do a thing like this. It jest goes to show—" He paused a moment, thinking how to continue.

"Now you take Sister here," he began again. "She started out as miserable a little piece of horseflesh as you'd see in a year of Sundays. But her trouble was in her legs. She was all right inside. So she jest kept on fightin' and fightin' till the first thing ye knew she was jest as good as the next hoss. And then she kept right on, and now look at her." He waved his hand meaningly.

Gil nodded gravely, and Jimmy sat perfectly still, surprised at Josh's burst of eloquence.

"Then, on the other hand," Josh resumed, "you take Luther Gilligan. Ye couldn't ask

for a better start in life than he got. Nice folks, he had, I've always heard, and comfortably fixed. But he had something wrong with him inside, and so he's never amounted to much of anything. All he ever seemed to want to do was to fool people into thinkin' he was quite a feller, and the only one he ever fooled was himself." He paused again, and his auditors waited in silence.

He continued: "Still, as I say, I never supposed he'd stoop so low as to go tamperin' with somebody else's hoss. It jest goes to show—" And this time he finished the sentence. "It jest goes to show how far wrong a feller can go if he gets off on the wrong foot. Prob'ly if he'd had a good jolt when he was a youngster, he'd have seen what a fool he was makin' of himself and changed his ways."

Still Gil and Jimmy remained silent, unwilling to risk breaking the spell of philosophy. Josh filled his pipe thoughtfully, lit it, and watched the smoke curl around his head.

"Jimmy," he said, and some unconscious change in his voice gave the boy a strange thrill. "Jimmy, you think it's pretty hard

lines to be cheated out of the use of your legs, don't ye?"

Jimmy nodded soberly. The sudden question almost upset his poise, and he was afraid he might burst into childish tears. Only his awe of this new and unfamiliar Josh held him rigid.

"And it is," Josh continued. "God knows it's hard lines on ye."

Feeling the man's pity, Jimmy had to struggle harder to fight back the nervous flood of tears that was welling up within him. But Josh drove the flood back with his next speech.

"But don't you be pityin' yourself," he commanded, forcefully. "All the legs in the world ain't worth the start you've got towards bein' a real man. You've seen your father leave his bed in the middle of many a cold, winter night, without hardly gettin' a wink of sleep, to help some poor man or woman that prob'ly never'll pay him a cent for it. And you've seen Luther Gilligan sneakin' home with a hunk torn out of his pants after tryin' to play a dirty trick on a hoss. And you know which of 'em was the most satisfied with himself next day. And

you've seen a crippled colt pull herself together and become a race hoss. You helped her. And you know how much satisfaction there was in doin' it.

"Boy, don't you be pityin' yourself. It's hard lines on ye, I admit, and sometimes you may think it's bein' rubbed in a bit. And I don't say ye wouldn't be jest as good a man if ye hadn't of been bothered with your legs. But what I do say is that legs or no legs you're a lucky kid in gettin' the right start in life. Sometimes I wish—"

But he didn't finish the sentence. Instead, he pulled at his pipe again, and then rose to his feet and looked into Sister's stall.

"Guess she's finished her breakfast," he said, and his voice was once more a flat, matter-of-fact, Yankee voice. "Guess we'd better take her out and let her stretch her legs. I hear she's goin' to be in a race this afternoon."

CHAPTER XIX

THE RACE

"ALL out for the free-for-all."

The call came at last. It was all in the course of the day's work to the white-mustached old marshal who rode leisurely along the path in front of the sheds and shouted out the summons. Before Jimmy Burbank was born, he had been marshal of the race track, shouting, "All out for the free-for-all." Now the words sprang from his mouth as effortlessly as "Squads right" comes from the mouth of an army sergeant.

But to Jimmy the words were loaded with import. They meant an end, and they meant a beginning.

He saw Luke Rolland, Mr. Gilligan's driver, hop into his sulky behind Lady Excelsior and disappear in the direction of the track even as the marshal was shouting. Three other

horses were out there, jogging up and down the track, waiting for the word that would start them racing.

Between Jimmy and the track loomed the grandstand. He could see only the back of it, but he knew that it was crowded with people, all waiting for the first heat of the race —the big race of the fair. He could hear them talking, though the music of a band rose above the babble of their voices, and vendors of ice cream, peanuts, and soft drinks tried to make themselves heard above the music. He could hear, too, the endless grind-organ melody of the merry-go-round, drifting across from the other end of the fairgrounds, the steady pounding of the side-show tom-tom, and the hum of chattering hundreds parading up and down the midway.

But all this meant nothing to Jimmy. It registered on his mind only as the vaguest sort of a background. For Josh was saying a final word to Gil, as the latter bent from his seat in the sulky. And now he was off. Sister was about to enter the track.

"Come on," said Josh. "Let's get out there."

Josh, carrying Sister's blanket over his shoulder, ready to throw it over her as soon as the heat was ended, hurried to the gate that led to the track. But the track was no place for a lad who could not jump or run in an emergency: Jimmy went into the grandstand, and sat beside his father near the entrance.

The starter was announcing the positions in which the horses would start. "Number Four, Wildfire, has the pole," he bellowed. "Number Two, Weak-Kneed Sister, second; Number One, Lady Excelsior, third; Number Five, Royal John, fourth; Number Three, Miss Mary, fifth."

"That ought to suit you," said Dr. Burbank, jotting it down on his score card. "Sister and Lady Excelsior get away about even."

"Fine," said Jimmy, watching the horses turn and fall into position.

And now they are coming down the stretch, their drivers trying to hold them in their rightful positions until they pass the starting post. The starter shakes his head, and rings a bell.

They must try again. Once more they come down the stretch. The starter shouts through his huge megaphone, "Hold back that pole horse. Hold back that pole horse." But it is no use. Once more the bell orders them to do an about-face and try it again. And again the starter: "Hold back that pole horse." This time things look more satisfactory. The lynx-eyed starter leans far out over the rail of the judge's stand, his hand on the bell, the megaphone at his lips. He teeters a bit as the horses approach the starting post. Then, leaning still farther over, he releases the bell rope.

"Go," he shouts, and the race is on.

Wildfire, the pole horse, sets the pace. She is a veteran of the race track, and has been a great horse in her day, but the crafty drivers behind her know that she is beginning to feel the ravages of time, and her speed will not hold out for the full mile. They are content to let her lead the way at first.

Sister and Lady Excelsior trot neck and neck close behind the leader. But Luke Rolland has maneuvered his mare into the inside

position, and thus has the advantage on the turns. He shoots ahead of Gil at each turn, but Sister makes it up on the straightaway. The other two horses are stringing out behind. They will fight it out between themselves for fourth place.

Once around the track they go, with no change in the positions. The heat is half over. It is time to take the lead away from the veteran Wildfire. And now it is that Gil takes advantage of his outside position. He touches his whip to Sister's back and shouts some unintelligible sound, and she fairly leaps forward. Wildfire's driver urges his steed on, too, but the strain is too much for her. She breaks into a gallop, and Sister passes her in a second.

Luke Rolland swings Lady Excelsior out into the middle of the track, and speeds by the galloping veteran also. But Sister now has the lead and the inside of the track. Vainly does Luke try to push his mare ahead of her. They race down the back stretch. For a moment Lady Excelsior seems to be passing. Her head shoots out in front. But a second later

it is Sister who is ahead again. She increases her lead on the turns, and comes into the home stretch. She is almost a full length ahead. The grandstand is a shouting, howling mob, for this is a local race, and interest is intense. "Yea, Sister. Weak-Kneed Sister," comes the shout. And, as if she heard the encouragement, Sister increases her lead. Down the stretch she comes, and Lady Excelsior cannot gain on her. Across the finish line, a full length ahead. Sister has won the heat.

"Boy," Jimmy sighed, and his face relaxed into a smile.

Dr. Burbank seized his son's hand, and pumped it enthusiastically. "A great race, Jimmy. Great," he said, as though Jimmy himself had been the one to pull the sulky around the track.

"I'm going back to the sheds," said Jimmy, hardly aware that his hand was being shaken. "Don't you want to come?"

"Go ahead," said the doctor. "I'd only be in the way."

Jimmy plodded hurriedly down the steps and out of the gate, the starter's voice follow-

ing him around the corner of the grandstand. "Number Two, Weak-Kneed Sister, wins the heat; Number One, Lady Excelsior, second; Number . . ." But Jimmy heard no more, for just then Sister saw him coming and whinnied.

"Good girl," said Jimmy.

He rubbed her nose while Josh slipped off her harness. "Do it again in the next heat, Sister," said Jimmy, "and everything will be all right."

But the next heat was different. Sister had the pole, and started off neatly in the lead. Halfway around the track, however, with Lady Excelsior and Wildfire in hot pursuit, she yielded the lead. First Lady Excelsior crept by her, and then Wildfire put forth a mighty effort and cut in behind Lady Excelsior. Sister was third as they raced by the stands the first time.

Jimmy, standing up and gripping his canes hard, lost all sense of his surroundings. "Come aw-on, Sister," he yelled.

And as the horses turned into the back stretch, Sister seemed to be heeding his call. Gradually she crept up even with Wildfire, and

then pulled ahead. But Lady Excelsior was still to be overtaken. Sister gained on her —gained on her—gained on her. But still she led. She was half a length ahead when they swung into the home stretch.

"Come aw-on, Sister," Jimmy yelled. "Come aw-on, Sister."

Sister came, straining every muscle for speed. But Lady Excelsior came, too. And hardly an inch did the little black mare yield to her flying pursuer. She crossed the finish line the same half-length ahead that she had been when she swung into the stretch.

This time Dr. Burbank said nothing to his son. If he had not been so absorbed in the race himself, he might have been interested in seeing how the boy would take defeat. But for the moment his whole attention was required by the task of concealing his own emotions. He sank back in his seat, and watched Josh run up to Sister, throw a blanket over her, and lead her from the track.

It was Jimmy who spoke, and he, too, was concealing his emotions. "I'm going back to the sheds," he said. He strove to keep his

voice from betraying the struggle between disappointment and hope that was going on within him.

The doctor nodded, and felt a smile of satisfaction spreading over his face as his son limped away. He was proud of the boy for saying calmly, "I'm going back to the sheds," instead of bemoaning the loss of his advantage in a race which was, to him, all important. It lifted the boy to manhood in the doctor's eyes —strong, self-contained manhood.

Now all depended on the third and final heat of the race. Lady Excelsior had evened up the score.

There was little conversation around Sister's stall as Josh, Gil, and Jimmy waited for the other races of the day to be finished. When they spoke, it was mostly in monosyllables—a word of praise for Lady Excelsior, a word of hope for the outcome of the final heat. Down at the other end of the sheds, Mr. Gilligan's strident voice could be heard in heated adjuration to Luke Rolland.

"Guess the squire's a mite excited," commented Gil, dryly.

"Let him yell," said Josh. "Mebbe he'll get his mare so nervous she'll run backwards, if he keeps up."

But when the horses were once more on the track, ready for the final start, Lady Excelsior showed no sign of fulfilling Josh's prediction. And when, after several false starts, they came down to the starting post in a manner satisfactory to the starter, she was trotting along in the pole position as smoothly as Mr. Gilligan, or any one else, could have asked.

Sister did not get away so well. The veteran Wildfire, always a strong horse at the start, crowded in on her and threatened to box her in. Gil, seeing the danger, attempted to veer Sister to the outside of the track, and the sudden tug on her bit disturbed her. She broke her gait, and before Gil could pull her down to a trot again, the entire field had passed her.

Jimmy sat perfectly still in his seat, watching this unfortunate beginning. Preston Gilligan, leaning against the fence down in front of him, turned and directed a grimace of victory at him. Preston was already thinking of

the scornful things he would say about Jimmy's mare when they were back in school again.

Sister settled down into her normal racing gait again, and set about the almost hopeless task of overtaking the field. The first two steps in the task were comparatively easy. Royal John and Miss Mary were no match for the three-year-old. She passed them both on the back stretch. But Wildfire was a still considerable distance ahead, and Lady Excelsior was an equal distance ahead of Wildfire—and increasing her lead every second.

Gil leaned forward in his sulky, holding the reins taut. As he turned off the back stretch and raced on to the next corner, Sister was closing up the gap between herself and Wildfire. Two lengths, a length and a half, one length. And as they turned into the long stretch in front of the stands, she wheeled out and passed the veteran. Only Lady Excelsior remained ahead of her now—but Lady Excelsior was the only one that mattered anyway.

Jimmy leaned forward in his seat. "Come aw-on, Sister. Come aw-on, Sister."

Preston, still confident, turned and looked

at him again, scornfully, but Jimmy had no eyes for Preston.

Lady Excelsior was leading by three full lengths, and as they raced down the stretch Sister gained little. But as they raced around the corners to the back stretch again, she crept closer. On the back stretch she cut down the lead to a length. On the turns she made this up, and turned into the home stretch less than half a length behind.

"Come aw-on, Sister," Jimmy yelled, and now Preston was too much absorbed to divert his eyes from the track.

In the grandstand everybody rose, as though by signal, and the din was tremendous. Jimmy's shouts merged into the shouts of hundreds, and so many were calling, "Sister," that the "s's" blended into a great hiss. The considerably smaller number who were rooting for Lady Excelsior only added to the hiss, as they pronounced the last half of her name.

The drivers were leaning out, almost over their horses, and their cries of "Ah-h-h, ah-h-h," added to the hubbub.

And now Sister was gaining—gaining.

Almost imperceptibly she cut down Lady Excelsior's margin of safety, and all at once the excited spectators realized that the two horses were racing toward the finish line neck and neck.

"Ah-h-h, ah-h-h," yelled the two drivers, and the grandstand roared out the chorus that sounded so much like a hiss.

Ten yards from the finish line they were still neck and neck. And then Sister seemed to leap forward, and her nose was clearly ahead of Lady Excelsior's as the race ended.

The hissing sound converted itself into a gigantic sigh of relief.

CHAPTER XX

A SURPRISE PARTY

SISTER'S racing days were over, but the racing world did not know it,—would not have believed it if it had been told. It was unthinkable that a three-year-old of Sister's demonstrated abilities should be allowed to waste her talents. Accordingly, Jimmy was deluged with offers to buy the horse and other offers to take charge of her future career on the race tracks. Naturally, he turned them all down.

Sister's racing days were over, but her life as Jimmy's companion and friend seemed to have just begun. The excitement of the race track had been pleasant, but it was even more pleasant to be able to turn to Sister whenever he felt the urge for a drive in the country. On the race tracks he had been only a part of the background, but now he could again be

the guiding member of the partnership between himself and Sister.

More than ever, now that Sister had won the race with Lady Excelsior, Jimmy felt the force of the tie that had bound them together since Sister's birth. More than ever was she the symbol of the overcoming of physical defects. He himself could never gain physical perfection, but she had done so. She had triumphed over Lady Excelsior, and in so doing she had triumphed for him over Preston Gilligan.

She had silenced his tormentor, for now Preston avoided him. In the first days of their return to school, after the fair, Preston had been silent and sullen. A little later, when Jimmy's determination to remove Sister from the racing world was reported to him, he had seen a new chance to sneer, but he had found that the sneers won him nothing but contempt, and had relapsed again into silence. Being an active youth, he could not forever remain sullen and silent, and gradually he had resumed his old habit of leadership in sports, but he was quick to turn the subject whenever Jimmy or horses formed the subject of dis-

cussion. Toward Jimmy he maintained an attitude of injured silence.

Jimmy was content. Being incapacitated for sports, he was willing to let Preston hold sway in that field, particularly since he now had a good substitute for active sports in driving. The dog Hezekiah had long done service as companion and playmate, when Jimmy had found himself unable to participate in the games of other boys, and for three years Sister had been another. Yet when Preston had jeered at him for being unable to do the things that other boys did, he had been filled with self-pity. Now Preston no longer jeered, and he found the desire to do impossible things less strong within him. He had discovered that happiness consisted in adjusting himself to his limitations, and making the best possible use of whatever powers were given to him.

He dropped back into the old pleasant habits of the days before Sister had become a race horse. And pleasure was made doubly pleasant now by the knowledge that Sister had proven her worth. Riding behind Sister in the buggy, he could glory in her more than

ever, knowing that he himself might be ever so helpless, but the horse which he had adopted into his life could surpass any other horse they would meet.

He lost his envy for the boys on their way to play football or basketball nights after school, for he knew that their delight in their game would not exceed his delight in finding a long stretch of road where he could let Sister unloose her speed and send a tornado of dust along the road behind his buggy. Let them scramble for a ball if they wished: he would hurry home with his dog and get Sister harnessed and be away. Hezekiah would hop up on the seat beside him, for the dog had learned that it was beyond his abilities to try to keep pace with Sister in the road. And often the lad would call in at Josh Thibber's garage and invite the proprietor to join them, in which case Hezekiah had to settle himself at their feet, and try to dig his toes into the wooden floor of the buggy as Sister quickened her trot and set the buggy to swaying from side to side like a ship in a storm.

And then there were long, pleasant Satur-

days, when Jimmy thought nothing of driving out to his grandfather's farm in the morning and back again in the late afternoon. Here Jimmy's old friend Aleck would go into rhapsodies over the colt that he had broken into the harness, and old Enoch Burbank, Jimmy's grandfather, would talk with him gravely, no longer as an old man to a chit of boy, but as one man to another. The old man recognized, as the doctor had, that Jimmy was gaining maturity and self-restraint under the tutelage of Weak-Kneed Sister.

"Your father tells me ye're goin' to keep the mare out of racin' after this," the old man commented, one day.

"Yes," Jimmy confirmed. "It isn't worth the risk."

"I cal'late ye're right," said his grandfather. "Racin' ain't what it used to be when I was a young man your age. I never thought of lettin' a year go by without takin' my best hosses over to Bryantsville for the trottin' races, and between times we used to trot 'em over on the Esdale road. But we raced 'em for

sport. Nowadays it's a business, and a pretty sharp one, too, as I've heard tell."

Jimmy agreed that times had changed, and as he drove home that night the completeness of the change struck his mind. He met automobile after automobile, but the only horses he saw were draft animals, hauling heavy carts. And he met two motorized trucks for every horse-drawn cart. Yes, times had changed. Even he could remember when motor trucks were unusual in Bryantsville, although Josh Thibber's livery stable had been converted into a garage before he was born. He almost wished he had been born into a horse-driving generation, and then perhaps he could have matched Sister against the other horses of the county without risking any such disagreeable episodes as he had encountered in modern horse racing.

"Well," he said to Hezekiah, stroking the dog's head and talking to him as though he had been privy to all his thoughts, "It might have been worse. What if we'd been born a hundred years from now, and there wasn't a

horse in existence outside a museum. Think what we'd have missed."

A few evenings later, Jimmy, struggling with a problem in geometry, sought his father for help. The doctor laid down a medical journal, and applied himself to the mathematical task. Then, as Jimmy gathered up his papers, the doctor looked him up and down, appraisingly, and spoke: "Jimmy, it seems to me you are walking better than you used to."

It was a subject that the doctor, understanding its painful nature, seldom mentioned. Accordingly, Jimmy was somewhat startled, but he concealed his emotions as much as possible and paused, thoughtfully and gravely.

"Do you think so, Dad?" he asked, at last. "I hadn't noticed much change."

"I don't suppose you would notice it much," his father replied. "The improvement has been slight and gradual, but honestly I think you have improved. I've been watching you."

Jimmy waited, sensing something more, and presently the doctor continued: "I've just been reading in this medical magazine," he said, "about a set of exercises recommended for such

cases as yours. I hate to give you too much encouragement, because you might keep at it for years, and get nothing out of it. On the other hand, there's just a chance it might help you a little, if you wanted to try it."

Jimmy, all eagerness, could hardly wait for his father to finish. "You bet I'd like to try it," he said. "Just think, I might be able to get along with only one cane, after a while. Or I might even be able to throw them both away. Do you think I might get to walk without any cane at all, Dad?" He was fairly trembling with the excitement of the thought.

The doctor shook his head soberly. "I don't know, Jim. I suppose there is a chance of it, but you must not build your hopes too high. As I said, it might be a total failure, you must remember that."

But Jimmy was not to be denied his moment of great hopes. "You know, Dad," he continued, "I've been wondering if there wasn't something that could be done with these game legs of mine ever since we brought Sister out of the dumps. Sometimes I've sort of had a

feeling that I might pull myself together sometime, just the way she did."

His eyes glittered for a few seconds, as his mind leaped from the past into the possible future, and then his face crinkled into a self-conscious smile. "Of course, I wouldn't expect to get into Sister's class," he said.

"No," said the doctor. "For heaven's sake, don't be getting your hopes up too high. And now you go finish your geometry, and I'll be thinking about what we might do about this. Maybe we'd better take a trip to Boston the first thing and see a specialist."

Jimmy withdrew, but there was no room in his brain for any more geometry that night. Instead he went to his room and tried plodding around, close to the walls, without the aid of his canes. He had often done this before, and it was no surprise to him to find himself progressing unsupported. Yet to-night there was a peculiar thrill in it. Sometime, perhaps, he would not even feel the need of staying close to the wall.

When he finally fell asleep that night, he dreamed that he was running a race with Sis-

ter. And when he crossed the finish line, triumphant, he was pleased to discover that it was not Sister at all, with whom he had been racing, but Preston Gilligan.

The dream evaporated, and he slept soundly, but he awoke in the morning with his mind full of the new possibilities that his father had opened up to him. He hurried into his clothes, and went to the stable to give Sister her breakfast. As she munched her oats, he stood gazing at her abstractly, recalling the long hours and days of her struggle against a handicap, and wondering if it could be possible that he, too, would eventually overcome the handicap that he had become accustomed to accept as insuperable.

Re-entering the house, he joined his father and mother at breakfast.

"We've just been talking things over, Jim," said the doctor, "and I guess you and I will take a trip to Boston to-morrow."

Accordingly, on the following day, the Boston-bound train bore Dr. Burbank and his crippled son toward a new hope. The specialist to whom they went added little to Dr. Bur-

bank's own estimate of the situation, however. It was encouraging, he said, that Jimmy had undergone some slight improvement without the aid of systematic exercises, and that might indicate even greater possibilities if the exercises were followed. On the other hand, he warned, science was still far from reaching perfection in the treatment of infantile paralysis and its after-effects, and it would be foolhardy to predict results.

Jimmy promised not to be too exacting in his demands for relief. "I guess it would be worth the trouble, even if I only got a little better—or even if it failed entirely," he declared, stoutly. "Anyway, I'd know I had tried."

"That's the stuff," said the specialist, and Dr. Burbank smiled, proud of his son's spirit.

The specialist then put Jimmy through the first set of required exercises, and followed them with a massage, giving Dr. Burbank instructions in this latter art as he proceeded.

"This is just what we did with Sister," Jimmy grinned.

"Sister?" repeated the specialist, inquiringly.

"That's his horse," Dr. Burbank explained, and then he went on to tell the story of the weak-kneed colt.

The specialist listened in wondering admiration. "Why, that's an epic," he declared at the end. "I guess we don't need to worry about a boy that has the courage to tackle that kind of a job, and the patience to stick to it."

He patted Jimmy encouragingly on the back, and the interview was over. That night the doctor and his son were on their way home again. The doctor, still worried lest Jimmy become too sanguine about the results of the treatment, talked seriously most of the way home. But Jimmy, with the enthusiasm of youth, was too full of hopes and dreams to assimilate much of his father's talk.

As the days passed, however, with their regular, interminable routine of exercises and massage, his spirits flickered. One day he would be optimistic about his chances of recovery; the next day hope would fail him, and the exercises would seem to be a useless task; another day impatience would beset him, and the time, if ever, when he would begin to bene-

fit by his new activities would seem so far in the future as to be hardly worth while. Yet he kept at it, day after day, and when he became particularly despondent, he would harness Sister and drive through the country until his spirits heightened. This almost always reinvigorated him, and gave him courage, for as he drove he remembered the weak-kneed colt that had been born to old Nettie, and the impatient days when he had watched for signs of improvement in vain.

By almost imperceptible degrees, Jimmy's ability to use his legs increased. At the end of a month, his halting gait was noticeably less awkward and labored, but the two canes were still essential to his efficient progress.

After two more months of slow but sure improvement, he found he could move about with one cane almost as well as he could formerly do with two. He was so happy at this discovery that he could not trust himself to talk to anyone about it, lest his emotions should overcome him and cause him to burst into girlish tears. Therefore, he took refuge in Sister and Hezekiah, and in the quiet stable he poured

into their patient and indiscriminating ears the words of joy which he dared not utter elsewhere.

The urge to have others join in his celebration was great, however, and eventually he hit upon a plan. In pursuance of it, he studied various letter forms in an old grammar, and penned the following epistle:

"Mr. James Burbank, Jr., requests the honor of your company at the picnic grounds, Smith's Grove, Friday afternoon at four o'clock.

"P.S. It isn't a picnic."

Copies of this mysterious invitation were sent to various of his school-mates, and also to Josh Thibber, Gil Morag and his father. Then Jimmy steeled himself to give no inkling as to what sort of a party he was planning. The curious ones, therefore, plied him with questions in vain, and then fell back on their own speculations.

"I've a good mind not to come," threatened Gil Morag, "seeing as you make it plain there won't be anything to eat. I'll bet you're going

to get married, or at least announce your engagement, or some such foolery."

"You'll be there all right," Jimmy challenged, "if it's only to find out what it's all about."

Jimmy was right. At the appointed hour, Gil was there, as were all the others who had been bidden. In the center of the picnic grounds, Jimmy had piled up a large bunch of fagots, ready for a match to touch them off into a bonfire.

"A weenie roast?" somebody suggested. But Jimmy merely smiled.

"Do you see any weenies?" he asked.

Gil Morag pushed through the crowd. "I thought it was going to be a wedding," he drawled, "but this looks more like a funeral pyre."

The boys tittered wonderingly, and drew closer, forming a circle around the fire. Dr. Burbank and Josh stood a little in the background, as eager to know the surprise as any of the boys, but trying to conceal their curiosity.

Jimmy lit a match, and touched it to the

kindling. The fire flickered for a moment, and then blazed up into the air. Still the host maintained his silence, and now his guests, sensing some sort of solemnity in the occasion, fell into silence, too.

Finally Jimmy turned away from the fire, and faced his friends. He had been planning to make a speech, but now the words that he had been rehearsing for days were gone from him.

"It is sort of a funeral," he said, simply, as though replying to Gil's last remark.

And then, lifting one of his two canes over his head, he solemnly tossed it into the midst of the flames.

For a few seconds the only sound that greeted Jimmy's surprise was a chorus of astonished gasps, like the wind blowing through the tree-tops. Then, as though by signal, the whole crowd broke into a triumphant yell, as the full significance of the act suddenly dawned.

Gil Morag, in the forefront, led the cheering. "Good boy, Jimmy," he shouted above the din. He seized Jimmy around the waist

and started to lift him to his shoulder, in which he was quickly assisted by several of the boys nearest at hand. With a tremendous uproar, they carried him around and around the blazing bonfire, like a football hero being carried from the field after a big game. Jimmy's flushed and beaming face bore out the comparison.

Dr. Burbank and Josh, standing a little away from the others, watched the proceedings with quiet smiles of satisfaction, and then as the procession slowed down from fatigue, the doctor pushed his way to its front, and clapped a hand on his son's shoulder, as the latter was deposited on the ground again.

The doctor wanted to say something to show his happiness, but being unaccustomed to such situations as this, he stood for several seconds in silence. Then, to cover his growing confusion, he had to take refuge in his dual position as father and physician. "Don't get too tired, Jim," he said. Then he retreated.

Josh, who had followed the doctor to Jimmy's side, was more articulate. "By George, Jimmy," he declared, "I'm proud of

ye. I thought ye'd done pretty well when ye pulled that mare o' yours through, but here y'are pullin' yourself through the same way. I ain't never goin' to be surprised at anything any more, and that's a fact."

A spontaneous howl of applause rose from the crowd of boys, and Ned Long leaped up on a convenient tree stump. "Three cheers and a tiger for Jimmy Burbank," he yelled. "Hip, hip."

The cheer echoed and re-echoed through the grove.

"Golly," said Jimmy, "I'm glad you fellows didn't think it was too much like showing off for me to get you up here."

By way of reply, they lifted him again to their shoulders and bore him out into the street and homeward.

People gazed from their windows and wondered what the pack of wild Indians was doing.

CHAPTER XXI

SISTER IS DRAFTED

DESPITE his improvement, Jimmy was still a cripple. One of his stout canes was in ashes, but the other was still a necessary part of his equipment. If he could move about more rapidly than before, he was still far from being the equal of his slowest schoolmates. Athletics and sports were just as far out of his reach as ever.

Now, indeed, his progress seemed to halt. Day by day he kept on with his exercises, and his father continued to give him the prescribed daily massage, but the results, if any, were so minute as to seem negligible.

For a few days, after his surprise party in the grove, his friends had invited him to take part in numerous activities which had formerly been beyond his powers. Gamely, he had tried

to do his share, only to learn that his powers were still limited. The other boys had discovered this, too, and though they tried for a little while to think of activities in which he could join them, the all-absorbing business of getting the most out of their own lives soon regained their young minds, and Jimmy was again forced to fall back on his own resources.

It might be assumed that this brief taste of the full life would have made his lot seem all the harder, but, as a matter of fact, Jimmy was distinctly relieved when he found himself once more following his old customs. The attempt to participate in the sports of his more fortunate friends had been full of bitter disappointments, and he was glad to be saved from further humiliation.

He still hoped that some day he would regain his full vigor, and be able to join the other boys as an equal. To that end he continued his daily course of exercise and treatment. But unless and until that time should come, he found life much more satisfactory in the old style.

With unmistakable relief, he fell back upon his old cronies, Sister and Hezekiah.

Autumn soon turned into winter, and again the roads were covered with snow. But Dr. Burbank, lover of horses though he was, had taken advantage of the ever-improving automotive equipment, and bought a snowmobile to carry him through midwinter drifts. With this automobile on runners he could get to the bedsides of suffering farm folks in almost any sort of winter weather. Old Nettie and Sister were the only horses left in his stable. The former was too old for any but the shortest trips, and the latter was Jimmy's. The doctor had become motorized, like the rest of the world.

Jimmy had expected to give Sister up again to his father with the coming of the snow season, but the purchase of the snowmobile made this unnecessary. So Jimmy had his own form of winter sports in sleigh riding, while the other boys went off on snowshoes or skiis.

But machines had not yet risen entirely above weather conditions, and one stormy mid-

winter afternoon Jimmy came home from school to find his mother waiting impatiently. The doctor's new snowmobile was stuck fast in a drift on the other side of Garshin's Hill, and the doctor was marooned in a nearby farmhouse. He had telephoned for help, but Josh Thibber's snowmobile was out on a trip, and the proprietor of the only other garage in town declared it impossible to get over Garshin's Hill in such a storm.

"Your father wants to know if you will take Sister and go out and bring him home," Jimmy's mother said.

Jimmy hastened to comply. He hitched Sister into the covered sleigh that had borne his father through many a storm in winters past, and jingled smartly off in the direction of Garshin's Hill. He felt almost triumphant as Sister pulled him easily over the sparkling roads. It was as if he alone were fighting the losing fight of horseflesh, and just at this moment, when mechanical genius seemed to have come completely into its own, the horse was once more needed to act in an emergency in which the machine had failed.

The snow fell so fast that it was almost blinding, and it had all but obliterated the meagre tracks that differentiated the road from the rest of the landscape, but Sister trotted on unhesitatingly, and Jimmy snuggled down in the buffalo robe, letting her pick her own way. Once or twice she seemed to stumble, and the sleigh tipped one way or the other, and then Jimmy would sit up and guide her back into the road again.

He soon arrived at the farmhouse, got his father, and started back.

"Do you want to go right home, or have you some more calls to make?" he asked his father.

"I just want to stop and see old Mrs. Jenkins, and then I'm through for the day, as far as I know," the doctor said. "It was a lucky thing for me that I had a light day to-day. Getting stuck in a snowdrift wouldn't be any joke most days."

Finding that there had been no serious consequences of the mishap, Jimmy could not refrain from chiding his father for abandoning horse-drawn locomotion. "Looks as though

horses might be good for something besides decoration yet, doesn't it?" he grinned.

The doctor, amused at his son's sense of triumph, stifled a chuckle. "I believe you're jealous, Jimmy," he said.

Jimmy realized that his chiding was likely to prove a boomerang, and subsided. "Oh, no," he said.

"Yes, sir," continued the doctor, "I think you're glad my gasoline toboggan got stuck so you'd get a chance to lord it over me with your unstickable horse."

"Well," said Jimmy, feeling it necessary to make an attempt to finish his boast, even though he knew he was no match for his father in a duel of persiflage, "she does ride the drifts pretty well, doesn't she?"

"Yes, sir," said his father. "The only wonder to me is that you didn't make me walk home, just so I'd appreciate the foolishness of my ways."

Jimmy grinned at the absurdity of the suggestion, and the doctor knew that he had stilled his son's reprimand.

"I'll tell you what, Jimmy," he continued,

more seriously after a few minutes. "I've driven horses and depended on them for a good many years. I know what they will do for you in a pinch, and how much you can depend on them. There's that in a horse that isn't in any automobile or steam train or aeroplane, and that's a living heart. I've grown up with horses, and I know them. I never owned a mare that could do the things this little mare of yours has done, but I've owned a good many that would give me all there was in 'em, and then try to give me more.

"I don't need to tell you, Jimmy, that I didn't buy that snowmobile because I wanted to quit using horses. You know better. But the world is moving right along, despite anything you or I can do, and it is just in the nature of things that automobiles are driving horses out of existence, and we have to submit to it. Sometimes I wonder if the world is any better for going faster and faster all the time, getting automobiles to move faster than horses, and aeroplanes to move faster than automobiles, and probably something else

to move faster than aeroplanes sometime. But when I doubt the value of all these changes, I remember the time little Mary Doggert was sick, and needed me in a hurry. If I'd had a horse even as fast as Sister, I'd never have reached her in time to save her life that day, but I had an automobile—and I got there in time."

The doctor paused for a moment, thinking, and Jimmy was too wise to disturb his train of thought.

"Yes," the doctor resumed, "horses are getting to be things of the past. But they're not to blame for that. They're just as fine as they ever were. Sister has pulled me out of a hole to-day. In a few years she won't be needed even for that. But she'll be just as willing, just as fine. And the fastest mechanical thing ever invented will never have her living heart. But she'll have to give way to it, for all that.

"It's one of the things about this life, Jimmy," and now the doctor's eyes travelled out over the snow-covered fields, as though those fields were life, and he was looking back

—"it's one of the things about this life that we have to sacrifice something every time we get something new. It all comes down to the old saying, 'You can't have your cake and eat it, too.' "

"I suppose that's right," said Jimmy, deferentially, "but I guess it'll be a long time before I'll sacrifice Sister for anything."

"I hope so," said the doctor.

The doctor lapsed into silence, thinking of the sacrifices life had called upon him to make. And Jimmy, watching Sister romp homeward through the snow, put all thoughts of sacrifice out of his mind.

Later that night, as he was laying fresh straw in Sister's stall, the conversation floated back into his mind.

"Don't you worry, Sister," he said, "you're not going to be sacrificed."

He reëntered the house just as the telephone bell rang a long, imperative summons. He paid little attention as his mother answered the call, but sat down and opened a book. Late calls were no novelty in the country doctor's household.

But after the first few words he heard a strange, terrified gasp from his mother, and he knew that this was no ordinary call. "Mercy," she cried. "Hold on just a minute." She lifted her voice, "James, James."

The doctor answered from upstairs. "Yes? What is it?"

"Quick," she said, breathlessly. "Preston Gilligan has been run over by a train. They're on the line here now."

Jimmy sat up, electrified, as the doctor bounded down the stairs.

"Yes—Yes—Yes," the doctor was saying. "You took him home? I'll get there just as fast as I can."

Jimmy waited to hear no more. He had suddenly remembered that the snowmobile was stuck fast in a drift on Garshin's Hill. The storm was not yet over, and it would be impossible to drive a regular automobile, even in the village streets. And Preston had been run over by a train—probably on the crossing just below his house. The doctor would have to hurry. Preston might be dying. He

clumped out to the stable as fast as he could and began to throw a harness on Sister.

Almost immediately his father joined him. "I'll get her harnessed," said the doctor. "You run in and get your coat and hat on. I want you to drive. I'll have to try to keep my fingers from getting chilled. May have to operate at once."

The doctor was no longer the philosophical man of a few hours ago, but a general, issuing orders on the eve of a major engagement. Jimmy obeyed on the instant.

The doctor was just finishing the task of harnessing when Jimmy returned. "Quick, jump in," he said, and tossed Jimmy the reins. He ran to open the stable door, and leaped into the sleigh beside Jimmy as Sister started.

They turned into the road, and Sister broke into a trot.

"Just as fast as you can, Jimmy," said the doctor. "It's life or death."

Jimmy grasped the reins tighter, shocked at hearing his father put into words the idea

which had been running through his mind as a possibility.

He leaned forward. "Come aw-on, Sister," he said. "Come aw-on, Sister."

Sister's tail straightened out, and her hoofs flew. She was racing again—racing with Death.

CHAPTER XXII

LIFE OR DEATH

IT was less than two miles to the Gilligan home, and Sister covered the distance in racing time. Yet this short space of minutes seemed interminable to Jimmy, as he leaned forward and urged the mare on through the darkness.

As long as they remained on the main street their way was dimly lighted by flickering street lights, which battled with the storm, and succeeded in illuminating little patches of the snow-covered street. But when they turned off the highway the road was indistinguishable from the rest of the obscured landscape. Sister rushed on, finding the road by instinct, and Jimmy kept himself posted as to direction by peering through the darkness at the dim landmarks along the way.

Here and there a lighted windowpane con-

trasted with the solid blackness of the night, but that was all. The carriage lantern on the side of the sleigh remained unlit, for the doctor had been in too much of a hurry to bother with inconsequentialities. But Sister found the road as she went along, Jimmy was familiar enough with his surroundings to pilot her in the right direction, and there was nobody else abroad in the stormy night to endanger their speeding progress.

The doctor was silent, his mind racing ahead of the racing horse. Jimmy spoke only to his horse. "Come aw-on, Sister. Ah-h-h, ah-h-h, ah-h-h."

They raced around a bend in the road, and the Gilligan house loomed ahead of them, light streaming from all the windows, as though it was the scene of some joyous occasion instead of a tragedy. Jimmy pulled on the reins, trying to soften Sister's gait as he wracked his brain to remember the exact location of the driveway leading from the road into the house. The lights from the windows flickered out on the snow, but no tracks indicated a driveway—only great drifts of snow

which grew greater as the swirling eddies played around them.

They raced past a great oak tree, and about a hundred yards ahead was another. Somewhere between those two trees, Jimmy knew, was the driveway. He pulled harder on the reins, exerting all his strength, but Sister was moving with too much momentum to be thus quickly halted.

Deliberately Jimmy chose the spot where he thought the driveway ought to be—halfway between the two oaks. He yanked on the rein, and Sister swerved off the road, still trotting at almost full speed. Then, before the boy knew what was happening, her feet struck glare ice under the snow. The sleigh balanced for a moment precariously on one runner, and fell to its side, spilling the doctor and Jimmy into a snowdrift. Slipping over an embankment, it threw Sister off her feet, and pulled her down after it.

Inside the excited house, nobody was aware of the doctor's arrival or the mishap attendant on it. The doctor picked himself up, his mind still on the work ahead of him.

"Are you all right, Jimmy?" he asked, quickly.

"Yes," said Jimmy.

The doctor waded hastily through the snow and seized his surgical case from the back of the overturned sleigh. He picked Jimmy's cane up from the snow, where it had fallen, and strode to his son's side, helping him to rise to his feet.

Sister was whinnying and squealing frantically, and kicking her legs about, but the doctor had a human life to save.

"See if you can help her," he said, "or call Josh." And he hurried into the house.

Sister redoubled her vain efforts to rise, and her wild squeals sent a chill through the boy. They were more than cries of baffled helplessness, he realized. They were screams of pain. She was injured.

He started to limp to her side, but slipped when he tried to descend the embankment, and fell in a heap beside her. Her wildly kicking feet were within a few inches of his head, and he had to crawl farther away be-

fore he could undertake to struggle to his feet.

Then he walked around to the other side of her. He noticed that it was only her front legs that were kicking. Her hind legs were merely twitching, as though they wanted to kick and had not the strength. He dared not think what this meant, but a great weight seemed to settle in his stomach, and he looked around him wildly. He took two or three steps toward the house, intent on summoning aid, but then he realized that there was no aid to be obtained in that house to-night. They were occupied with another tragedy.

He tried to bend over and unloose the harness from the helpless horse, but her head was pounding the snow and her kicking feet kept her body continually in motion. He was helpless, and her agonized squeals continued to strike terror into his breast.

"—or call Josh," his father had suggested. That was it. He must call Josh. He would know what to do—if there was anything that could be done. He felt himself sobbing, but

it didn't matter. He turned again toward the house.

This time he went to the door, pushed it open, and walked in. Nobody was in sight. All were upstairs, where he could hear low voices, funereal voices. He went from room to room, until he saw the telephone. That was what he was looking for. Nothing else seemed real. He seized the receiver and gave the operator Josh's number.

"Josh," he said, when his friend came on the wire, "Sister's hurt. I'm out at Gilligan's. Fell down. Can't get up. Her legs. There's nobody to help me. Please come out. Please hurry."

He knew that he was being incoherent; that his voice must sound strange. It sounded strange to himself—strange and far away, as though it were somebody else's voice. But he knew that Josh would come out as fast as he could. He hung up the receiver and hurried back to Sister.

She was still struggling and squealing. The terrible, unearthly screams that came from her seemed to vibrate in his heart. His sobs

were uncontrollable, and he made no effort to check them. But he tried again to unloose the harness. He took out his pocketknife and tried to cut it away, but every time he bent over her she writhed and twitched so much that he withdrew, lest he send the knife into her body.

Yet he could not stand idle and see her suffer—listen to her groans. He walked again to the house, but stayed outside, leaning against the wall. And then it seemed that he could not stay away from Sister, and he returned to her side. Then back to the house again. Then back to Sister. He had worn a path through the snow by the time Josh arrived.

Josh came in his snowmobile, and as his headlights flashed around the bend in the road they revealed Jimmy standing over the prostrate horse, staring at her in dumb helplessness. He started involuntarily to meet Josh, as the man jumped out, but Josh waved him back.

"I'm comin'," he called.

He waded through the snow, and threw the

rays of a strong flashlight on the struggling, squealing mare.

"H'm" he said. "See if ye can hold down her head. Ye'll prob'ly have to sit on it."

It seemed an unkind thing to do, but Jimmy had seen horses cast before, and he knew that this was the only way to quiet them. He pushed Sister's head into the snow, and tried to lower himself onto it.

"I'll help ye," said Josh, seeing the boy having difficulty. He held her head down, while Jimmy sat down on it, still frankly sobbing.

Josh wanted to say something to comfort the boy, but he dared offer no hope until he had learned the extent of Sister's injuries. He pretended not to notice the boy's sobs.

Deftly he cut away the harness, and pulled the sleigh back out of the way. Then he turned his flashlight upon Sister's twitching hind legs, running his hand up and down over them.

Presently he shook his head, and looked at Jimmy soberly. "Both broke," he said.

Jimmy knew what this meant. A horse

with broken legs—yet he tried to convince himself that he might be wrong. If Josh would only say something more. But Josh merely looked solemn.

"Can't we—can't we get her home?" Jimmy asked. Yet he knew what the answer would be.

Josh shook his head again. "Jimmy, my lad, they's only one kind thing to do for her now," said Josh. He put the flashlight in his pocket, and waited, hands clasped behind him.

"Only one kind thing to do." Jimmy knew what it was. And if Josh said it was true, it must be true. He tried to speak, to answer Josh's unspoken question, but words stuck in his throat. He reached out and clutched a portion of Sister's mane, clinging to it as though those few strands of hair were her life, and he was holding it by main strength. Then he dropped the hair, and smoothed it down on her neck, and gently patted her as he sat there on her head. He sensed no incongruity in the situation. He sat on her head because he wanted to save her. And he patted her neck because he didn't want to

lose her. Both acts were prompted by love, however opposite they may have appeared.

Finally he summoned words for the waiting Josh. "All right, Josh. Only let—me—go away."

Josh helped him to his feet, and himself held Sister's head down while the boy walked away.

This time Jimmy did not walk to the house, but off into the darkness. He felt hot tears streaming down his cheeks, and he had no desire to stop them. He only wanted to be alone, out of sight. He came to the road, and sat down on a snow-covered rock.

Behind him a shot rang out, and then another and another. Each time he jumped, but after the third shot he sat perfectly still, and the tears dried in his eyes. It was all over now, and this thought brought him relief. The nightmare was over, and he had awakened. To be sure, the world into which he had awakened was cold and cheerless, but at least he would not hear Sister's screams of pain any more, or see her struggling and be unable to help her.

After a few minutes he arose from the rock, and walked back to Josh, who was spreading a blanket over Sister's lifeless body. The older man put his arm around his young friend's shoulder.

"It's a mortal shame," he said, "a mortal shame."

Jimmy said nothing.

And then as they stood there, looking at the snow fall gently on the blanket, Dr. Burbank came from the house. A smile of triumph was on his face, and for a moment he appeared to think nothing of Josh's presence. His mind was still occupied with the things that had been happening inside the house.

"The boy will live," he announced, as Josh and Jimmy turned toward him. "I had to amputate his leg, but he's out of danger now."

Then, for the first time, he seemed to realize that something had gone wrong. The fact that the sleigh had overturned had long since been crowded from his mind, but now it returned to him. His eye fell on the detached sleigh, and then on the motionless heap under

the blanket. Under the edge of the blanket a little spot of red showed on the white snow.

"Jimmy!" cried the doctor, and the boy felt the sobs rising again in his bosom.

The doctor gripped his son's hand, and shook his head, sadly.

"A mortal shame," said Josh.

CHAPTER XXIII

A LOVE FEAST

ANOTHER fall had come, and Jimmy was going away to college. He was eager to go; to try a new life; to make new friends; to study new subjects. It had been difficult to readjust himself to a life in Bryantsville without Sister. But now he was going to plunge himself into a new manner of life, and perhaps he would not miss her so much in different surroundings.

In the year that had passed, Jimmy had made slow but steady progress in his physical condition. He still used his cane, but now it was more of a guarantee against accidents than a perpetual support. He carried it now with such a jaunty air that a stranger might have thought it a mere ornament. Yet a closer scrutiny would have told the stranger that there was some imperfection in the young

man's locomotive power. His gait was still somewhat stiff and unsteady, but the old, laborious twisting of his whole trunk with every step was gone.

He had been to Boston with his father to see the specialist several times within the year, and on the last trip he had received great encouragement. It seemed entirely likely now, the noted physician had said, that Jimmy would be practically normal by the end of another year. Arrangements had been made with the physical instructor at the college where Jimmy was going to give him special attention. He was eager, therefore, to put himself under the direction of this man, who had accomplished wonders with many puny and ill-formed youths.

Mrs. Burbank had been busy for days getting together shirts, stockings, underwear, towels. Now she called to him.

"Jimmy, you haven't been fitted for your new suit yet. You'd better attend to it right away, or you'll be going to college in your old clothes."

Obediently Jimmy started for the tailor

shop. He whistled to Hezekiah to follow him. The dog was getting old, and waddled along with more of an air of pompous dignity than formerly.

Boy and dog walked slowly up the street. And then the boy stopped abruptly. Coming toward them was another boy, about his age and, like himself, walking with the aid of a cane. He seemed to pull one leg after the other.

"Preston," Jimmy muttered to himself.

He had not seen his old enemy since that terrible day in the previous winter. Preston had been sent away to a hospital, and after being fitted to an artificial leg he had been taken on a trip by his father. Jimmy did not know that he had returned until he saw him coming on the street.

He walked on, studying the approaching Preston. And now, for the first time, he felt profoundly sorry for the boy who had delighted in tormenting him. His own troubles had barred him from the natural activities of boyhood, but Preston had been a leader in these very activities. And now he, too, was

a misfit. The sight of Preston walking with a cane, and dragging one leg after the other, brought home to him the completeness of the change. He knew how bleak life had seemed sometimes to him, who had never been able to play. How much more bleak it must seem to Preston, who had lived only to be a leader in physical sports, and who was now unable even to participate in them.

He tried to bring a smile of greeting to his face as they met, but the smile would not come. He stopped and held out his hand.

"Hello, Press," he said.

"Hello, Jimmy."

Jimmy struggled for words. "Press, gee—I'm sorry."

Preston winced, and Jimmy could see him fighting to control himself. "Don't, Jimmy. I—I—" He swallowed rapidly, but could not go on.

Jimmy felt stronger at seeing the other so weak. "It's pretty tough, Press, to get all bunged up like you and I are, but you'll find a lot of things you can do."

"Oh, I'm all right now," said Preston. "The

only thing is I—I—know how rotten I've been now. And Jimmy,—the worst thing about it all is about your horse—Sister—I'm awfully sorry—I—" Again he was unable to continue.

"Well," said Jimmy, "I did hate to lose her. But it's all right now. It was her last race—and she won it."

Jimmy felt embarrassed. He wanted to propose to Preston that they be friends now, and thus put the seal on Sister's sacrifice, but he was afraid of appearing weak and sentimental. Then he realized that words were not necessary. They were friends. Preston was patting Hezekiah's head. This was a token of friendship.

"Come on in the drug store and have an ice-cream soda," said Preston. "I'm feeling flush."

They turned together toward the drug store.

"Come on, Hezekiah," Preston called. "You get a plate of ice cream, too. It's about time we three had a love feast."